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No DVD...? Some people say the text we put there is juvenile, lame, stupid and dumb. Funny thing is... these are the same people who don't check that the DVD is in the bag before they leave the shop. Now who's the dummy?



BACK FLIP

SLIDE

PARRY



"A SURE CONTENDER FOR GAME OF THE YEAR" - IGN



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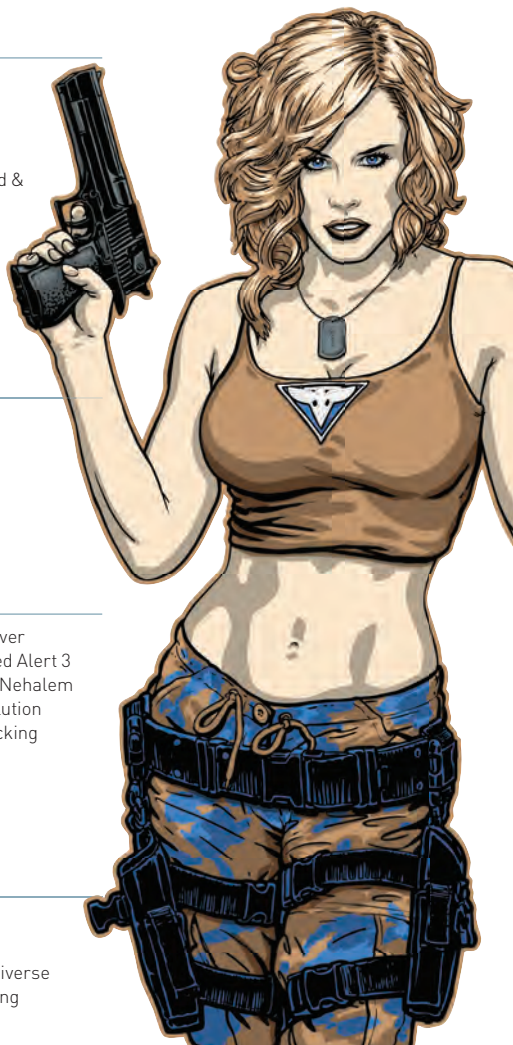
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YES WE CAN!

WELL HERE IT IS. December, a crazy time of the year where a lot of money will be spent on a lot of things we don't really need. However, considering the economic problems facing the world, I expect this festive season will be a little less merry for the suppliers, distributors and retailers. The good news is that the gaming industry is apparently recession resistant. Someone forwarded me an important report or survey the other week that discussed our industry and how most gamers just keep on buying games regardless of how tight their budgets are. The concept is that people 'migrate from expensive leisure activities such as eating out, travelling and purchasing high-end electronics to games with longer entertainment value'. The same report then also goes on to say that they're uncertain how long this exclusion will persist.

I'm thinking, burn the cash while the going is good people. So, unlike all those other sensible magazines that are warning their readers to take it easy this season and to shop around and not blow their entire bonus all in one go, here at NAG we have a different message for you. Blow it all as soon as possible. In fact, try to burn through as much of that money before you even get it by placing pre-orders and loading up that credit card now. Buy as many games as possible and only get cheap presents for those relatives you never see or hear from during the year. There's just so much to choose from between now and the end of the year; you're not going to be able to cope with just one or two new games. Go wild people... That's an order.

MORE...

To spice things up a little this issue, we did something different with the *Red Alert 3* and *Dead Space* reviews. Tell us what you think and if you'd like to see more. Then, here's a notification / reminder to make sure you catch the January 2009 issue of NAG (on shelf 18 December). The January issue will be full of all the other major December releases we didn't catch in this issue and an awesome preview of the new *Prince of Persia* game (we're playing it right now but it arrived just too late for this issue). ;)

NAG is also running a monster survey in the January issue with cool prizes like a high-end gaming machine, games for a year from one of our distributors, vouchers, a box of crap from the NAG office and some other prizes we're trying to get final confirmation on. Make sure you complete the survey properly and send it to us. Remember how just the other month a great new leader was elected in America – you have the power to make NAG what you want (well at least the majority of you). We take our survey very seriously and will make all the requested changes in time for our special April birthday issue. Hooray!

COVER STORY

This month's cover story is a compelling misadventure of epic proportions. International distribution treaties were breeched, release date embargoes were shunned and about eight people were fired. No, just joking. The real truth is that the story just isn't that interesting, so I was trying to spice it up a little. Originally we were going to do *Need for Speed: Undercover* on the cover, but the artwork we received just wasn't compelling enough to feature on the NAG cover. Lucky for us, we always have a backup plan and I think the *Red Alert 3* image of Yuriko is 'rock and roll'...

Michael James
Editor



FAR CRY 2 MAP EDITOR COMPETITION

Marco Arcangeli sent us a picture of the map he made in *Far Cry 2* (see the image on this page somewhere). Marco gave me a good idea for a competition. Send us your best *Far Cry 2* maps and the winner will get something cool, like Ubisoft goodies, a free game and a NAG subscription. You can send us screenshots or the actual map file itself (preferred). It must have the word NAG on it (or a close representation thereof somewhere) – the bigger and bolder the better. Your map should also be playable and make sense, so a giant barren island with NAG carved out on the rocks isn't going to do it. Send your maps to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line: 'Map This'. The competition closes 31 December 2008 and the winners will be announced in a future issue... Good luck and try to be creative.



NAG

editor

michael james
michael.james@tidemedia.co.za

technical writer

neo sibeko

staff writer

alex jelagin

the guys who do everything nobody else wants to

geoff burrows
dane remendes

national sales manager

len nery
len.nery@tidemedia.co.za
+27 84 594 9909

sales manager

dave gore
dave.gore@tidemedia.co.za
+27 82 829 1392

contributing editor

regardt van der berg

copy editor

nati de jager

international correspondent

miktar dracon

contributors

clive burmeister
megan hughes
adam liebman
walt pretorius
tarryn van der byl

sales executive

cheryl bassett
cheryl.bassett@tidemedia.co.za
+27 72 322 9875

marketing and promotions manager

jacqui jacobs
jacqui.jacobs@tidemedia.co.za
+27 82 778 8439

art director

chris bistline

senior designer

chris savides

photography

chris bistline
dreamstime.com

office assistant

paul ndebele

tide media

p o box 237
olivedale
2158
south africa
tel +27 11 704 2679
fax +27 11 704 4120

subscription department

subs@tidemedia.co.za

internet

www.nag.co.za
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Q. Why sperm donation is MORE expensive than blood donation?
A. Because it is hand made.

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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Paul

SUBJECT: PC Gaming and cloud computing

"RECENTLY WHILE NOT BEING lazy I've been doing some research about cloud computing. In a nutshell, cloud computing is a concept where the Internet is used as a platform and user created content is stored somewhere in the vast space that is the Internet and easily accessed again through a web interface, similar to Google Docs. Although it is a relatively new concept, cloud computing is surely set to take over computing in the future.

At the moment this concept of cloud computing isn't such a big deal for gaming in general and PC gaming in particular, but experiments are slowly creeping in. Valve for example announced Steam Cloud a while back. By storing all saved games, profiles and key-bindings online, the player will never have to set these again. It will just be install and play, as simple as that, or that's the idea at least. Operating systems are likely to become cloud-based in the future as well – even Microsoft is working on a cloud-based system codenamed 'Midori'. If operating systems as we know it gets replaced by a mere browser and everything you do gets stored online that's great, but where does it leave PC gaming? I know companies like id Software are experimenting with Quake Live which will launch in a browser window, but if our future is to have everything stored online, do we really need PC gaming? Aren't consoles then the way to go?

To an extent 'yes' would seem the obvious answer, but it need not be the case. With powerful companies like IBM, Google and Yahoo sitting with spare processing power, it may remove the need for powerful PCs in the future and just let the remote super computers handle the processing, bringing back the idea of the player just sitting with a terminal (not quite, but sort of). Some may argue that this takes away the essence of what enthusiast PC gaming is all

about – tweaking, over clocking, customizing content and hardware – and they will be right, it certainly will take away an important aspect of the whole PC gaming culture. But that said does it really matter? PC gaming requires the player to stay up-to-date with trends in the IT world, but cloud computing can make it so much easier to just grab a game and play. Much like consoles actually which brings me back to the point: is there still room for PC gaming in the future?

When cloud computing comes along strong one day and the infrastructure is in place, games will most likely reside on servers while processing is taken away from the user and may even be distributed among computers (much like Folding@Home). Mixing cloud with distributed computing could result in lower cost, because a super computer running all the processing will be very expensive. To further cut down on cost, in-game advertising could replace a monthly subscription fee and the cost of distributing games on optical media will be non-existent. Using this method, piracy can also be greatly reduced or even cut out completely. There are a lot of possibilities that developers can exploit to keep PC gaming alive while keeping cost low for themselves and for gamers. Should they get it wrong however it could ultimately doom PC gaming. Only time will tell."

Nice letter. As you say, only time will tell. The real challenge is overcoming the love affair most gaming enthusiasts have with their computers. You only have to look at a LAN like rAge to see just how much energy and passion people have when it comes to their rigs. Your computer is your baby. Steam is an excellent delivery mechanism and online storage facility of inconsequential things like save games and key-bindings, but this is one thing – playing games remotely using a dumb terminal is another thing entirely. Ed

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The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...



FROM: James

SUBJECT: Family Policy Institute

"I PURCHASE MY NAG MAGAZINE religiously and find many articles that really intrigue me, which most people may find odd from a gaming magazine. However, your October issue with the article on page 30 "yapping by the mountain" really stood out for me. I am an avid gamer, on PC and Xbox. I have been a gamer for some time, including having played on multiple other platforms. I remember times when parents were outraged by games such as Duke Nukem, Dungeons and Dragons, and I even remember reading something that Monopoly was a horrible influence on children as it did not teach them the true value of money, or how to manage it. Who cares! If the FPI wants to raise concerns where banning violent and offensive materials, such as games and music from our stores, then I

beg to ask the question, why stop there? We are so quick to judge and blame, not only in SA but abroad. We blame corporations, artists, designers and even marketing for what is happening in our world today. We forget that the world in itself has turned on its head, and that violence is being bred worldwide, but not by the manufacturing of violent or offensive music or games, but by the ever increasing pressures that young people face today in general. My escape from my hectic life at work is my gaming. I can pound away at the enemy behind closed doors, and not feel the desire to go out and commit murder on my fellow man. When will parents take ownership? When will the governments of the world take ownership? If we are to remove gaming and music that contain offensive and violent material because of the fear it "breeds" violence in young adults, then surely we should look at other

things that breed violence, that actually have been scientifically proven to cause countless deaths the world over, such as alcohol. Do we ban alcohol altogether? No, we place marketing out there, clearly indicating age restrictions on the purchasing of alcohol. But wait, don't we do the same for gaming? If parents allow their children to play such games beyond their age restriction, then the responsibilities must fall on them, and their ignorance must be assessed, because no longer can they say, they just didn't know what the game was about, because then they are equally responsible for not taking an active stance in their children's lives. What about something far deeper in terms of banning material that contains violence and perhaps this may be extreme, but let's step back and view religion. How many wars over the centuries have been waged in the name of religion? How many millions of lives have been taken in the name of our Gods? Should we ban religion? Perhaps the bible? It causes death, has violence, even some offensive material. Surely if parents took active and participative interest in their children's lives and activities in a constructive manner, which includes focusing on their children's everyday lives, and paying attention to their personalities and changes therein, then we would not need to raise a red flag each time something horrible happens, like what happened in Krugersdorp. Ban music and gaming? Please, I would no sooner stop eating or drinking. I explore these activists to look at the root cause of problems, not the underlying ones such as games and music. Please also note that the idea of religion used above is purely to stress a point, and is purposefully used in context at how ridiculous people are becoming. I in no way would ever condone or recommend such an action. As I hope that responsible parents would do when it comes to gaming and music. I wish your magazine the very best, and will understand if this letter is never published, or omitted in anyway. I love the magazine, keep up the wonderful work."

Sorry for the long mails people (we'll be back to our usual programming after this), but it's important to highlight in this issue that we received many e-mails about this topic and many very intelligent arguments. It's important to fight for what you believe in, and it's really good to see so many impassioned views about violence and gaming. Ed

FROM: Christo

SUBJECT: First Date No-No?

"SERIOUS QUESTION THIS, REALLY. Should a guy disclose his gamer status on a first date?

Additionally, should a girl do the same? If the guy a gamer-girl is on a first date with is a gamer, then she'd definitely score some big points with him. If he's not, then in the very least he'd be intrigued by her chosen hobby, no? On the other hand, I don't think many non-gamer girls are too impressed when they find out their hot date is into games.

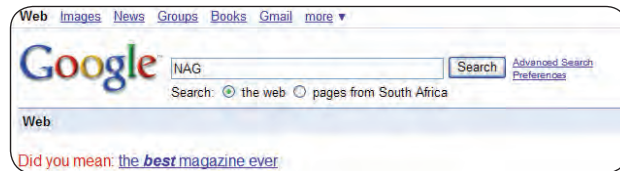
I pose this question because recently I had a very unpleasant experience on one such first date. I was the gamer guy, she the non-gamer girl. The look of sheer horror on her face when I mentioned that much of my free time was occupied playing computer games was positively disconcerting. Hey, I was confident that a girl with a memory stick in her purse would have no problem dating a gamer like little old me. Apparently, I was horribly wrong; the evening was cut short and I haven't heard from her since. I'm now seriously considering keeping my dirty little hobby a secret from all future love interests. Looks like gaming should also be filed under other first date no-no's like insults, farting and the discussion of marriage and children."

NAG FAN ARTWORK

This is what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. In no order of importance:



Darren Tomkins: "So this image took roughly about 2 days to create. It would have taken a long time and massive machine power to render with the waterfall in 3D as well as there is quite a bit of geometry and custom textures for the reflection material to process. I had to tone down the waterfall texture a lot and then still make it up in post production. Hope it's enough to take home the Guinness Book – Gamers Edition this month."



Geoff Raikes: "Google never lies"



The readers who send in the best NAG fan art each month receive a copy of Guinness World Record Gamer's Edition 2008

Okay, I'll pretend this is a serious question instead of sending you off to answers.yahoo.com. Always disclose your gamer status to everyone you meet. If a girl or boy you meet is negative about games, then all that's going to happen in the future is you'll end up playing less games after you get married, because they always complain about your game time. Your life will become miserable as you watch the years slowly waste away with someone who ruined your hobby for you. Before you know it, you'll be rocking on a porch with a blanket over your legs sipping your tea and drinking your liquidised muffin while you hope nobody notices that you've pissed in your pants again. Hide your gamer status – the very idea. Ed.

FROM: Jazz

SUBJECT: Letter

"OKAY... THIRD LETTER, NOT a bunch of babbling I believe. But then again... what I believe is strictly debatable. Alright... it's a question... you're probably going to call me an idiot for asking it, but what the heck? Okay... I've noticed since COD4 arrived Counter-Strike has died out. Now I was an avid player of Counter-Strike until I noticed the beautiful levelling mechanism of COD4 multiplayer. It's much better than anything Counter-Strike can offer in my opinion and that of my LAN friends. Now here is my question: Will a new Counter-Strike come out to rival that of COD4 or will Counter-Strike merely fade to a distant memory to most of us?"

I often get down on both knees and offer my thanks to the gaming gods above that Counter-Strike is finally seeing its last days. I used to lay awake at night terrified that another year will come to pass where Counter-Strike was the only game people were playing at LANs and competitions. I'm still to this day stunned that it lasted so long and that people

couldn't move on with their lives and play all the other hundreds of excellent games that were released over the dark nine years of Counter-Strike. So yes, it will become a memory, a painful one of a time when gamers around the world kept obsessing and playing the same game for nine years. RIP 'Counter-Suck', may you burn in hell. And don't give me that look – you know I'm right. Although, having said all that, we still play Quake III at the office to this very day. ;) Ed.

FROM: Tessa

SUBJECT: November NAG Page 22

"I WOULD LIKE TO REQUEST that a statement made on page 22 of the November NAG, under the article titled 'Told You So', be retracted. The statement, in brackets, reads "because everybody knows girls don't play on the Xbox 360 or PS3". My name is Tessa; I am a 23 year old qualified teacher and come from Pretoria. In February when my boyfriend of 2 years left me, my break-up gift to myself was an Xbox 360. My favourite games include Gears of War, Oblivion, GTA and I am currently playing Battlefield Bad Company. I think the fact that I have completed GOW on Easy and Hardcore and am currently playing it on insane says something really important: I could kick most men's asses on Xbox. I am however failing to scrape enough money together for the GOW 2 collector's edition, so anyone who feels like sending me one should feel free to do so. ;) I really enjoy reading the NAG every month and will someday find that damn beaver pirate thing."

It's a badger, not a beaver. Anyway, I'll retract it if you insist (you sound a little scary :)), but I think the line of text you're not happy with was some playful sarcasm. We all know girls play Xbox 360 and PS3. Tarryn, our female freelancer, is an Xbox 360 'nut-job' and can rocket-impale people in Halo 3 while in midair using only one hand. She's also a little scary. Ed. **NAG**

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: What are your thoughts on platform exclusives such as Gears of War 2 coming out exclusively for 360, and LittleBigPlanet for PS3? Do you like it, hate it, does it make you as a PC gamer jealous?

Chevron: "Doesn't make me jealous at all. I'd rather have the exclusives stay where they are than receive a bad port. Multiplatform games are a scourge. Having to develop for the lowest common denominator means no platform strengths are taken advantage of."

Cleric: "Exclusives give a console its personality. The downside of course being that it fuels the fanboys."

Gh0st_828: "At this point, I really don't care. PC gamers (though a lot of us won't admit it) get enough love from the developers already. The problem with a multiplatform game is that most of them tend to be pathetic ports."

Insomniac: "It can be frustrating to see a great game and knowing you can't play it, but every console needs their 'Killer Apps' to drive demand and forge an image in the market."

shewman: "It may make people who do not own all the platforms jealous, but the fact is that if every game came out on every platform, then there would be no point to having different platforms. There might as well be one platform that all games are released on."

G8crasha: "It's not only PC gamers that should hate console exclusives. PS3 fanboys won't get Gears of War 2 and 360 fanboys won't get LittleBigPlanet, and PC won't get either."

MaTth1as: "Unfortunately I do not have the luxury of owning a console, I doubt I ever will but the prospect of exclusive titles to consoles does give me the urge to go out and buy one, even though in my opinion, a great console title should always come to PC."

B4warn3d: "It doesn't make me jealous at all, I think platform exclusives should stay like they are, because it usually was the exclusive titles that let the gamer experience the 'true potential' of their platform. Be it Wii, Xbox 360, PS3 or PC."

Domanskip: "Exclusives serve a dual-purpose in that they attract people to the specific console and help give each console a unique feel. If every console and every PC had a generic library, life would be very boring. As they say, variety is the spice of life! It would be foolish to harbour jealousy for that which gives each facet of gaming its unique flavour."

dammit: "All the more reason to invest in the [currently hellishly cheap] Xbox 360..."

Mik10707: "I love the exclusives... they justify the stupid amount of money I've blown to own all of the platforms. I love playing games and I want to be able to play anything that comes out. Exclusives IMO: great, keep them coming."

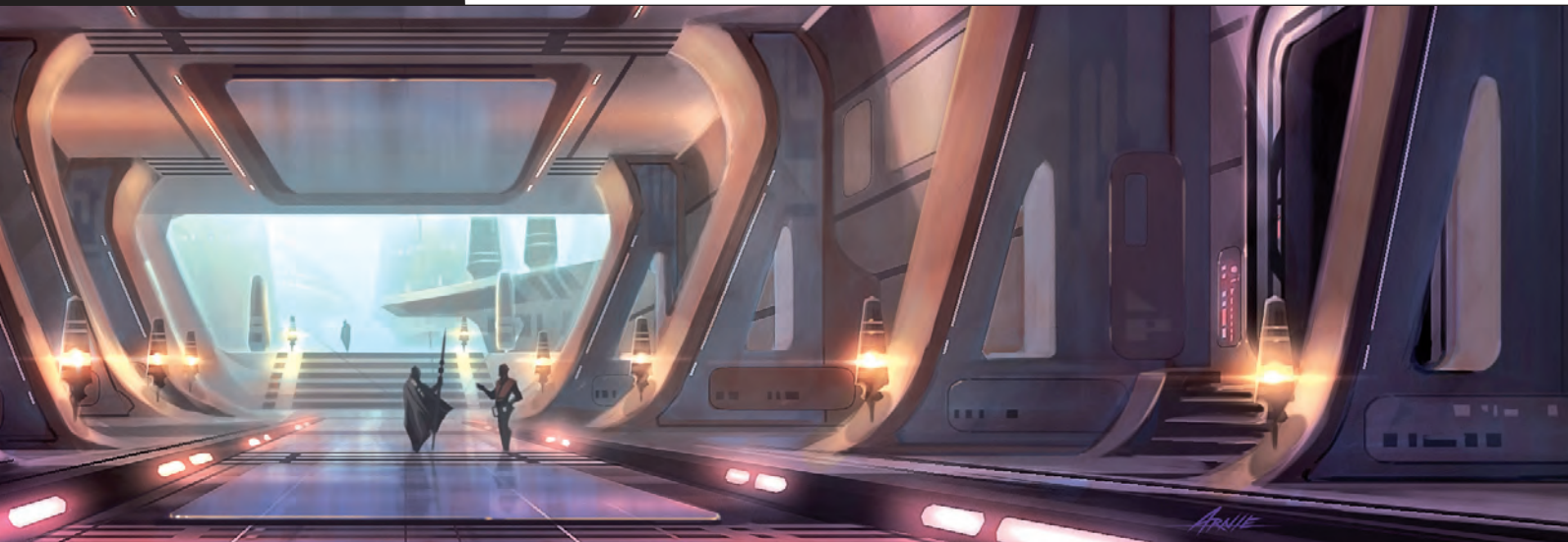
Fredder: "Nope, it does not bother me that much. However it would be nice if games which were brought to PC like Fable could still get a PC version. Just to keep the ball rolling. I thoroughly enjoyed Fable but won't be able to enjoy Fable 2 now as well as Gears of War 2. Again, sucks to be me."

Graal: "It just makes me more eager to get an Xbox 360."

Darkon5524: "Does not really make me jealous, as there is not just exclusives on Xbox 360 and Ps3, there are also certain games on PC that gamers without consoles can't play. I see them all equal in that term."

Awsomemic: "As a PC gamer it doesn't affect me much, it actually encourages me to buy an xbox360."

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE NAG FORUMS:
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BIOWARE CONFIRMS THE OLD REPUBLIC

THE RUMOUR HAS BEEN floating around for some time, mostly spurred on by rampant fanboys and those bitter about the fall of *Star Wars Galaxies*. Now, at long last, after months of hint-dropping and non-committal statements from developers and publishers alike, we know the facts: BioWare, under the EA label and alongside LucasArts, is officially working on an MMORPG based in the *Knights of the Old Republic* setting, entitled *Star Wars: The Old Republic*.

Set 300 years after the events in *KotOR*, but still thousands of years before the start of the films, *The Old Republic* will throw the player into the role of either a member of the Sith Empire or the Galactic Republic during the start of a new war between the two factions. Although peace has reigned for some time, new troubles are rising and the brittle ceasefire is losing its hold. While few technical elements have been revealed yet, we do know that BioWare is taking a firm 'story over grind' stance, which is the least

we'd expect from the veteran RPG stable. Still, it's not the first time we've heard such promises, but BioWare has been making big claims about NPC reactions and moods having real impact on player progression through the game. Other information that's leaked, is that there will be "dozens" of planets to visit and explore, different classes for each faction and unique storylines for those classes to follow, although each side of the conflict will have a core story with which to focus all the classes.

This is BioWare's first attempt at creating an MMORPG - a historical event in itself - but that's not to say they'll be stepping lightly around WoW's dominance. Frank Gibeau, president of EA Games, told reporters that they "have very high expectations for this. Just look at the base of *Star Wars* fans, plus what BioWare can do. Trust me: we want to win. EA's reputation is for wanting to win." With *Warhammer Online* performing well and *SW: TOR* on its way, we'd be hard-pressed to think otherwise.



NEED FOR SPEED RIDES AHEAD OF THE PACK

EA and Nissan are further breaking through the boundaries separating videogame geeks and petrol heads, unveiling Nissan's 370Z for the first time in the upcoming *Need for Speed Undercover* - at least eight weeks before the car 'hits' motor shows. This bold move shows just how powerful a medium videogames can be in the promotion of products outside of the gaming industry, allowing potential buyers to accurately 'test drive' the vehicle in the virtual streets thanks to the efforts of developers Black Box and their painstakingly accurate digitisation of the vehicle.



GOT TO GET YOU INTO MY LIFE

The godfathers of rock/pop are finally (and really, it's about time) making their way into the popular *Rock Band* series. The remaining Beatles, who have been notoriously tight-fisted when it comes to digital distribution licensing, have finally buckled under what must have been immense pressure from MTV Games and EA, and will be teaming up with Harmonix to produce not just downloadable content for the massively popular series, but an entirely new product covering the history of the iconic band. Van Toffler, president of MTV networks said, "We're going to provide the ultimate platform for new generations of fans to start their own love affair with the Beatles."



DEXTER GAMES ON THE WAY

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE SERIAL KILLER will be making his way into your living room and onto your iPhone with the upcoming *Dexter* games by Mark Eckō Productions and Icarus Studios. The folks who brought us the wall-tagging *Mark Eckō's Getting Up* are teaming up with Showtime to bring us the killer's psychopathic adventures in multiple episodes and on different platforms. The only confirmed 'platform' is Apple's iPhone and no release dates have been announced. According to the developers, the gameplay will be similar to Ubisoft's *CSI* adventure games, requiring Dexter to piece together evidence and clues during a police investigation, and ultimately choose to hand over the suspect to the officials, or enforce justice Dexter-style (usually involving drill-bits and loads of cling-wrap, for those unfamiliar with the show).

EVERYBODY LOVES TANKING

Those who paid attention during the development of *Warhammer Online* may recall that four character classes were dropped from the roster shortly before release, with Mythic citing balance and time issues as major contributing factors. Now that *WAR* has been released and the developers have had some time to get their ducks in a row, they're revisiting the dropped classes and are preparing to release two of them before year-end as part of a free update (well, as part of the updates you pay monthly fees for).

The Empire's Knight of the Blazing Sun and Dark Elf Blackguard will make their way into the game as part of the upcoming 1.1 patch, along with 14 new chain quests and a handful of other content. Both classes are of the tanking variety and will likely be near-mirrors of each other. For players hoping that the Orc Choppa and Dwarf Hammerer would make it as well, Mythic GM Mark Jacobs is keeping quiet, but dropped a few hints that at least one of the outstanding classes will make a comeback in the uncertain future.

NEW EXPANSION FOR COMPANY OF HEROES

When Relic Entertainment isn't busy dominating the sci-fi side of RTSs with their popular *Dawn of War* series, they like to spend a relaxing evening working on the game's WWII-based step-sister, *Company of Heroes*. Due for release about the same time as *Dawn of War 2* (Q2 2009) will be a new expansion for *Company of Heroes*, titled *Tales of Valor*. Players can expect three new single-player campaigns, more multiplayer maps and more units to send to their fate. Relic has also been talking about a new weapon feature called "direct fire" that will supposedly enhance the tactical control during intense battles.

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snippets

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HOLD YOUR HORSES

Console owners and couch co-op lovers are in for a bit of disappointment: *Sacred 2* is still undergoing final touches and won't be ready for release on Xbox 360 or PS3 this side of Christmas. With the PC version showing a few bugs and an entire control system to rework, not to mention the multiplayer aspect, Ascaron is holding back until early 2009 for the console versions. CEO Heiko tom Felde said, "We have committed ourselves to offering gamers nothing but top quality. In order to be able to further optimise the online components of the console versions, and ensure a simultaneous release worldwide, we have chosen to aim for this release date for the console versions."

EPIC EXPANDS ITS
HORIZONS

We're all fans of the *Unreal* series, but *Unreal Tournament III* didn't quite press all the right buttons – no matter how close it came. Whether it was the lack of game modes we've come to love over the years or its calmer pace compared to other FPSs, there's certainly something missing in the game. Thankfully, we're not the only ones looking for a little more out of the *UT* franchise. Mark Rein, VP of Epic Games, has recently announced the company's plans to release a "major expansion" for the game during a rumour-quelling discussion about Epic and Midway's supposedly slipping ties. He claimed that despite Midway's recent product cuts, the *Unreal* brand is going strong and looking to expand its user base with the upcoming expansion.



STARCRRAFT II TRIPLE PLAY

THE ORIGINAL STARCRRAFT'S STORY was epic – so epic that it required the *Brood War* expansion to really do it justice. *StarCraft II*, however, is going to take it a step further, with a minimum of two expansion packs planned for the game. The first release to hit the shelves won't just be *StarCraft II*, it'll be *Terrans: Wings of Liberty*, featuring a Terran-only single-player campaign. No less than a year later, *Zerg: Heart of the Swarm* will be released, followed by another year-long wait for *Protoss: Legacy of the Void*. Each release is set to pack a hearty 26-30 single-player missions, as well as the addition of exclusive units and technologies. While players will be able to play all three races right off the bat, they'll have limited access to the units unlocked with each expansion if they don't own them.

In an interview with Blizzard's Bob Colayco, he outright denied Activision's involvement in the decision, claiming that, "Activision doesn't really factor in, because ultimately the people calling the shots on how this game is going to turn out are the *StarCraft II* dev team. This trilogy decision was really made by that team." He also had an interesting comment on the future of Battle.net, something a lot of us were concerned would happen: "All I can say is that once we figure out and develop what it is, we're going to look at it and come up with something that makes sense from a business perspective. It could be anything, and it could also vary a lot from region to region." That's right, B.net could be a pay-for service come the release of *StarCraft II*.

VIOLENT AND ILLITERATE: SOUNDS ABOUT RIGHT

While it's fairly common knowledge that most politicians don't know Link from Master Chief when it comes to gaming, one has to wonder just how far they think they're willing to stretch their ignorance for a drop of political favour. Some months back, London Mayor, Boris Johnson, linked several London stabbings to videogames, citing them as a major contributor to teen violence in the city. In January last year, he went as far as claiming that videogames worsen the growing illiteracy problem; that the youth are neglecting their ability to read and instead playing videogames (videogames that don't contain any writing, we'd assume). You'd be surprised then, no doubt, to find that this same man has been actively supporting the recent London Games Festival. He said, "I'm delighted that the London Games Festival is back in our city for its third year. It demonstrates the creativity and range of the gaming industry, which, as an important part of London's creative sector, makes a vital contribution to the economy as a whole." Well, that makes a bit of sense then – there's a couple of quid involved.



THEY SAID IT...

"Guys get religious [about it]. Zombies are slow and shambling. Everyone knows real zombies move slowly! 'No, zombies move fast!' [laughs] You know, I haven't seen a real zombie. I'm just saying."

Michael Booth, lead designer, *Left 4 Dead*

"There's stuff in *Civilization* that we've taken; there's stuff from *Master of Magic*, *Heroes of Might & Magic*, *Risk*, *Populous* – you name it. I have no shame when it comes to borrowing and being inspired by other games."

Stardock CEO, Bard Wardell, on *Elemental: War of Magic*

"We want people to play this game and say, 'Wow! I never thought there would be [a] story in an MMO, and there is and I love it and I'm going to play this story forever.'"

Daniel Erickson, lead writer, on *Star Wars: The Old Republic*

"We're only seeing the tip of the iceberg with games and interactive 3D. Games are becoming mainstream today; tomorrow social networking and e-commerce will use interactive 3D technology as well – virtual worlds will become commonplace."

Mark Petit, senior VP, Autodesk

"There's a certain amount of people that will always not care about the action. I'm a big believer in empowering the user. If the user wants to skip all the cut-scenes, if he wants to ignore the collectibles, if he doesn't give a crap about the story, fine, let him do that."

Cliff Bleszinski, design director, *Gears of War 2*



FREE MEMORY UNIT FOR 360 CORE, ARCADE OWNERS

WITH THE NEW XBOX Experience (NXE) update out by now, Microsoft has confirmed that owners of Core or Arcade units who don't have the 128MB free space required to install the NXE can apply for a free 512MB Memory Unit or a discount on an HDD.

There is a catch though: you won't be eligible for the free 512MB MU if you have at any time had an HDD attached to your 360. Certain gamers claim that if you call Microsoft Support and harass them enough (because your friend brought over an HDD, but you don't have one, for example), they'll make a show of grudgingly accepting your request.

While the free MU programme is predominantly a European and American deal (you can find out more here at <http://www.xbox.com/en-US/support/hardware/memoryupdate/default.htm>), our own local Xbox sleuth, CraigN, reports that Microsoft South Africa is working on a similar

programme for South African Xbox 360 owners (<http://craign.net/2008/10/14/south-african-nxe-storage-solution-confirmed/>).

The NXE upgrade package is downloadable via LIVE as a standalone package, so it should appear on the NAG DVD as soon as possible. Future games will also include the NXE upgrade package on their discs.



IT'S ALIIIIIIIVVVVE!!

Gamers on a budget have typically used the excellent Xbox Arcade (and previously, the Core) system to pave the way for their explorations into the world of current-generation videogaming. For the price you pay for a system like that (currently available for as little as R1,799), there's no denying the product's unbelievable value for money. However, the Arcade package is severely lacking in its ability to cope with all the features offered by Xbox LIVE, especially when it comes to downloading XBLA games and demos. Worry not, dear 'gamer-on-a-budget': Microsoft has an extremely cost-effective solution for you. Enter the Xbox LIVE Starter Pack, featuring a 60GB hard drive, a headset, three months' LIVE Gold subscription and an Ethernet cable – filling the gap between the Arcade and Premium packages. While there were no confirmed local prices available at the time of going to print, buyers can expect the kit to set them back about R1,000.



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BIGGER SPLASH = BIGGER WAVES?

Splash Damage has been on the hunt for talent following the announcement that they've partnered with Bethesda. While there's no solid news yet on what it is exactly they're up to, they've been very busy expanding their development team, grabbing employees from Massive Entertainment, *Heavenly Sword* developers Ninja Theory and RPG veterans BioWare, among others. Studio head Paul Wedgewood claims, "We're building the best team we've ever had" – which is great news considering that their last release was the desperately average *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. It's time for Splash Damage to up their game, and it looks like they're gearing up to do just that.

HAMMERS JUST CAN'T CUT IT; EA BREAKS OUT THE AXE

All is not well in the world of Electronic Arts, it seems. The mega-publisher has recently been forced to slash a staggering 600 jobs from its payroll worldwide to curb the losses currently affecting the company (as well as the industry in general). While only accounting for 6% of its total workforce, the job cuts will save the company approximately \$50 million. John Riccitiello, chief executive of EA, claims a slowdown in the retail sector during October was the main driving force behind the cuts, although he's confident that this short-term solution will pay off in the long run.

**STREET FIGHTER IV PRINT CAMPAIGN TAKES YOU BACK**

Taking things back to classic with their upcoming *Street Fighter IV*, which aims to represent the original experience 'how you remember it' instead of how it actually was, wasn't enough for Capcom. They decided to take the print-ad campaign for the game back to late '90s style as well, with big cheeky text and solid-colour blocked backgrounds iconic for that era of gaming when "bigger" really did mean "better." Check out some of these eye-popping pages that clearly speak to the arcade-junkie in all of us.

**SOUL CALIBUR IV: GET VADER ON 360, YODA ON PS3**

WHEN NAMCO BANDAI TOLD the press that Darth Vader and Yoda would remain on their respective console domains in *Soul Calibur IV*, they were obviously lying. Shockingly, Namco has confirmed that, due to "overwhelming fan response," you can now fill those suspiciously blank character portraits in the character select screen by paying for downloadable Darth or Yoda.

For PlayStation 3 owners, \$5 will get you the frog-like Yoda and Xbox 360 owners can shell out 400 Microsoft Points to get Darth. Both characters are about a 10MB download. May the Force of your Wallet be with you.

TONY HAWK SKATEBOARDING HERO?

If you think being a game reviewer is the best job in the world, you'd be incorrect. The best job in the world is surely being an analyst, which in gaming amounts to nothing more than being a non-gamer who gets paid to think out loud about gaming.

According to analyst Doug Creutz of Cowan and Company, Activision is expected to ship a skateboard peripheral with their next Tony Hawk game (which is due for release sometime in 2009). "We believe that the extra year of development time and opportunity for consumers to shake off franchise fatigue could contribute to better unit sales than the franchise has enjoyed in recent years," wrote Creutz to investors.

"We also view it as highly likely that the game will include some sort of skateboard peripheral with all SKUs when it ships, given the massive success (and higher price points and profitability) of Activision Blizzard's Guitar Hero franchise."

Sound logic, true, but just because Guitar Hero and Rock Band have done well with their expensive peripheral-based games, doesn't mean every single game should suddenly sport yet another plastic doodad to clutter up your living room. It certainly is appealing for a publisher to tack on an extra cost to play the game with more "immersion", but one has to wonder how far consumers will let it go before they start voting 'No' with their wallets.

**HIDEO KOJIMA: "JAPAN IS TRAILING WESTERN GAMES"**

During a discussion at the Tokyo Game Show, *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima spoke frankly about the Japanese game development market.

"If you honestly compare Japanese games with Western ones, Japan is trailing." During the discussion, Kojima compared the Western games industry to Hollywood, in that they bring the world's best creators together and give them huge budgets for their projects. He went on to call the current disparity between Japan and the West "dangerous," especially when it comes to how far Western technological development has improved over the last few years.

In a coy final statement, he teased about his next project, which may be announced at TGS 2009.

"Until the end of this year, I have my hands full with *Metal Gear Online*, but at next year's show, I think it's okay that I should be able to announce something."

**THE EVOLUTION OF: Command & Conquer**

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Red Alert (1996)



Tiberium Sun (1999)



Red Alert 2 (2000)



Generals (2003)



Tiberium Wars (2007)



Red Alert 3 (2008)

CONSOLE WATCH



SONY'S SHARE PRICE recently dropped to its lowest level in 16 years, following the company's alarming 57% cut of its own annual profit forecast for the fiscal year ending March 2009. Part of the problem is the rising yen, affecting Japanese exports. Other companies affected include Canon, Honda and Samsung; all have slashed their annual earnings projections. Sony's current financial woes don't seem related to the PlayStation 3's sales performance, as the company has seen an 86% rise in sales compared to last year.

Sony has filed for a patent for wireless motion-sensitive controllers for the PlayStation 3, which use an "ultrasonic tracking system." "Game interface tracks the position of one or more game controllers in three-dimensional space using hybrid video capture and ultrasonic tracking system," read an abstract submitted to the US Patent & Trademark office. "The captured video information is used to identify a horizontal and vertical position for each controller within a capture area. The ultrasonic tracking system analyses sound communications to determine the distances between the game system and each controller and to determine the distances among the controllers," detailed the document.

The **PlayStation 2** continues to outsell its successor in Japan, according to tracking data from Media Create. For the week ending October 26, only 3,931 PlayStation 3s were sold, down from the previous week's 4,725 units. During the same week, 6,962 PlayStation 2s were sold, while 60,476 PSPs were shipped, thanks to the new PSP 3000. Sales figures for the Wii were 24,292, the DS, 22,965, while 7,844 Xbox 360s were sold.

Nintendo reported that its net income has grown 9.4% year on year, but revised its end-of-year net income forecast, adjusting it by 16%.

According to Nintendo, shipments of the **DS** have now surpassed those of the Game Boy Advance. The DS has shipped 84.33 million units, with the Game Boy Advance having shipped 81.36 million units during its stately run. Nintendo DS software sales have reached 454.53 million units worldwide.

The new **Nintendo DSi** has been released in Japan, and 200,000 units have been sold during the first two weeks. Users seem impressed by the built-in Web browser, camera and improved audio functions, not to mention the slot for SD memory cards and the slightly larger screen. A release date for the console in the US, Europe and elsewhere is not expected until mid-2009.

Sony's new **PSP 3000** has been criticised by consumers about scan lines that appear on the screen. While the PSP 3000 sports a brighter screen, it appears to have image issues. "Yes the colour gamut is wider, yes the black levels are lower, but this screen now has what looks like scan lines that were not visible on PSPs before," commented one user, adding: "I am not happy about my 'upgrade'." According to SCEI and SCEA, there is nothing that can be done to fix the problem. "On some occasions, scan lines may appear where brightness changes drastically, due to the hardware features of the new LCD of the PSP 3000," according to Sony.

GABE NEWELL: CONSUMERS KNOW GAMES BETTER THAN PUBLISHERS

As most gamers who have experienced the Developer Commentaries from more recent Valve games have come to know, Gabe Newell is always happy to receive e-mails from the gaming community. This may well be the foundation for his recent statements in an interview with *Game Informer*. The Valve co-founder and managing director went so far as to compliment gamers for their intelligence in understanding games.

"It seems by and large that gamers are incredibly smart," he said. "The average

gamer seems to know more about what makes a good game than the average person at a publisher."

Valve and Newell make no attempt to hide their publisher antipathy. From 2002 to 2005, his company was involved in a complicated legal scuffle with publisher Vivendi Universal. It started when Valve sued Vivendi for copyright infringement, which was followed by Vivendi counter-suing with claims that the Steam digital distribution service breached its publishing contract.

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CORPORATE NECROMANCY

Despite the upcoming demise of *Hellgate: London*, with its European and US servers officially going offline on the 31st of January next year, HanbitSoft, who recently acquired all *HG: L* and *Mythos* publishing rights outside of the US, Europe and "possibly Japan," is unflinching in the face of financial failures. The South Korean-based publishers, who have been operating the game's servers over on that side of the world, have recently formed a US-based development studio comprising former Flagship and Blizzard employees, who are reportedly working on a new expansion for the title. It seems like HanbitSoft may just be wondering along the path of ignorance here; they'll need to make some serious changes to the game to ensure success where Flagship failed.



FANBOYS UNLEASH THEIR COLLECTIVE WRATH

Not content to just sit in their living rooms and play the games on the consoles they've decided to buy, PlayStation and Xbox players have been attacking the opposing team's big guns for the holiday season. *LittleBigPlanet*, *Gears of War 2* and *Resistance 2* have been hit the hardest in Metacritic.com's user scores. Despite the fact that the large majority of the users hadn't even touched the game when they submitted their scores, they've ranked *Gears 2* as low as 34%, despite it receiving an average score of 95 from official critics. *Resistance 2*, while fairs a little better, is seeing user scores of 53% versus the official 89%.

Games editor of the site, Marc Doyle, urges readers to ignore any wildly differing user scores for now, saying, "If people want to stuff the ballot box, there's not much I can do at this point." Metacritic.com is currently working on a new registration system to help curb any future attacks on both systems' headline titles.

MICROSOFT SUES DHL AFTER TRAIN DERAILMENT

MORE THAN 21,000 XBOX 360 consoles were damaged after cargo-delivery service DHL Express suffered a train derailment in Texas. In a complaint filed in the US District Court for the Western District of Washington in Seattle, Microsoft is seeking \$2 million dollars from DHL in damages. Two containers filled with Xboxes sustained "impact damage, wetting, pilfering and shortage" after the derailment near Duke, Texas.

The Xboxes were on their way to Hong Kong, en route from a Microsoft office in McAllen, Texas, to Long Beach, California. Microsoft claims that DHL has refused to compensate for the loss, even though the service "negligently breached its duties as a common carrier, handler, bailee, warehouseman, agent, or in other capabilities," according to the court papers.

DHL has yet to comment.

It's been a bad end-of-year for the Xbox 360, actually. In Colorado, a man was indicted for illegally reselling Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 consoles, returning inoperable consoles to retail outlets and online retail sites for refunds as if he had purchased the consoles legally. According to the US State Attorney's Office in the District of Colorado, the 27-year-old purchased consoles at Target, Amazon.com, Buy.com, Best Buy, Circuit City, Sears, and Wal-Mart, using several credit cards. He then took the consoles out of their boxes, removed the serial numbers and put them on older, broken consoles, returning those consoles to the retail outlets. The estimated loss from the scam came to \$182,001.



JAGGED ALLIANCE 3 (SORTA) COMING SOON

Back in 2006, when licence-holders Strategy First revoked Games Factory Interactive's rights to develop the long-awaited *Jagged Alliance 3*, the series was left longing for a continuation with no hope in sight. Soon after, Strategy First announced a new developer and it looked like the beloved turn-based strategy game was finally getting its dues. However, all was not well in the land of *Jagged Alliance* and almost two years later, we're still seeing the same tired screenshots and press releases. Thankfully, Russian developers and publishers GFI continued working on the game under a number of different codenames, and in November last year completed the project after settling on the title *Hired Guns: The Jagged Edge*. It's taken until now for the title to see Western localisation, however. After experiencing a long crossover process to German, it's finally getting ready to ship to North American shores in time for Christmas through publishers Tri Synergy. We're anxiously waiting to see if that means we'll see copies dock in our fair country. By the looks of things (and thanks to some translation from our resident Russian), the game has turned out to be exactly what the series needed.

GAMING CHARTS

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES — MP3 • ACCESSORIES

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Saints Row 2
- 2 Dead Space
- 3 BioShock
- 4 MotorStorm: Pacific Rift
- 5 LittleBigPlanet

XBOX 360

- 1 Gears of War 2
- 2 Fable 2
- 3 Fallout 3
- 4 Midnight Club: Los Angeles
- 5 Lips

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 2 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009
- 3 FIFA 09
- 4 Lego Batman: The Video Game
- 5 SingStar ABBA

PC

- 1 Call of Duty: World at War
- 2 Command & Conquer: Red Alert
- 3 World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
- 4 Far Cry 2
- 5 Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

PSP

- 1 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
- 4 Crash Bandicoot: Mind Over Mutant
- 5 Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

WII

- 1 Wii Music
- 2 Link's Crossbow Training
- 3 Super Smash Bros. Brawl
- 4 Boogie SuperStars
- 5 Disney Sing it! (Featuring Camp Rock)

GfK

September figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Unreal Tournament III
- 2 Gran Turismo 5 Prologue
- 3 Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
- 4 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09
- 5 Grand Theft Auto IV

XBOX 360

- 1 Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
- 2 Forza Motorsport 2
- 3 Viva Piñata
- 4 FIFA 2007
- 5 FIFA 2008

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Ben 10: Protector of the Earth
- 2 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 2008
- 3 Need for Speed: Most Wanted
- 4 The Sims 2: Platinum Triple Collection
- 5 God of War 2

PC

- 1 Spore
- 2 The Sims 2: Apartment Life
- 3 Need for Speed: Most Wanted
- 4 FIFA 2007
- 5 The Sims 2: Deluxe

PSP

- 1 Burnout Legends
- 2 Ben 10: Protector of the Earth
- 3 Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
- 4 FIFA 2007
- 5 Pimp My Ride

WII

- 1 Wii Fit
- 2 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09
- 3 Mario Kart
- 4 Wii Play
- 5 Star Wars: The Force Unleashed



EVERY LITTLEBIGPLANET SHALL HAVE THE TASTE OF DEATH

THE OCTOBER 24 RELEASE date for *LittleBigPlanet* was unexpectedly pushed back a few weeks when Sony abruptly recalled every single pressing of the game disc already sent out to retailers.

A few copies still managed to reach gamers who pre-ordered, and some industrious gamers quickly put their copies up for sale on eBay for up to \$249. Sony had to recall and scrap millions of copies of the game and send out fresh copies without an offending music track, highlighted by a *LBP* Beta-tester on the Sony Beta-tester forums just before the game's release.

According to a press release from Sony: "During the review process prior to the release of *LittleBigPlanet*, it has been

brought to our attention that one of the background music tracks licensed from a record label for use in the game contains two expressions that can be found in the Qur'an. We have taken immediate action to rectify this and we sincerely apologise for any offence that this may have caused. We'll confirm the new launch date shortly."

The offending phrases, sung in the background of a savannah level, were "kollo nafsina tha'iqatol mawt" (Every soul shall have the taste of death) and "kollo man alaiha fan" (All that is on Earth will perish).

Aside from losses due to having to remanufacture the entire stock, it's not expected that this event will have any significant impact on *LBP* sales.

LITTLEBIGXNAPLANET

Between Microsoft's XNA development platform and *LittleBigPlanet*'s intuitive and powerful level editor is a pretty big gap in user-generated content utilities. While hardcore coders can have their way with XNA for a small fee, effectively able to develop almost any game for the XBL platform, and *LBP* giving users access to a playground of creative tools to build anything from a calculator to a *Gradius* remake, what about those of us who want a little more? Enter Microsoft with *Boku*, a 3D, icon-driven, downscaled version of XNA with a focus on ease-of-use, letting budding developers create anything from an arcade racer to an adventure game. No release date has been specified yet, but there's a fairly detailed video trailer available that leads us to believe we'll see *Boku* hit shelves in time for the holiday season next year – if not sooner.



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

When the Activision/Vivendi merger had a number of titles 'canned', the future of highly anticipated games such as *Ghostbusters*, the *Riddick* series, a sequel to *50 Cent* and Tim Schafer's heavy metal adventure title, *Brütal Legend*, suddenly became very uncertain. Thankfully, Atari has swooped in and saved a few damsels in distress, pulling *Ghostbusters* and the upcoming *Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena* out of the 'dark' and into an "almost definitely" 2009 release, with the *Ghostbusters* game (once again) set to coincide with the release of the trilogy-ending film. Not content to leave it at that, Atari has also signed a deal with Universal to publish more *Riddick* episodes in the future.

There's an easier way.

Download the **BulkSMS** Text Messenger from BulkSMS.com. It is easy to install, readily available on your desktop and ensures the effortless use of bulk SMS messages using the Internet.

For more information on our services SMS "nag" to 31020 and we will call you back. Standard rates apply.



BILL ROPER: FROM SINKING FLAGSHIP TO RISING CRYPTIC STUDIOS

Ex-CEO of Flagship Studios, (developer of *Hellgate: London*) Bill Roper, has joined Cryptic Studios as design director on the upcoming DC Comics MMO, *Champions Online*.

Before founding Flagship Studios (which recently had to fire its entire development staff and cancel upcoming MMORPG, *Mythos*), Roper was a key figure in the development of *Diablo* and *StarCraft* at Blizzard Entertainment.

His new position at Cryptic will have him adapting the original pen-and-paper RPG to the MMO realm, which promises players "total customisation" of their superheroes.

"Bill brings a ton of creative energy to the Cryptic office and we're thrilled to have him join our team," said Cryptic boss John Needham. "His years of gaming and online experience are huge assets to all of our projects, and Bill will assist us in furthering our studio's vision to create innovative, exciting MMO gameplay."

Cryptic Studios is no stranger to superhero MMOS, having been remarkably successful with their *City of Heroes* and *City of Villains* MMORPGs.

"Cryptic has experienced huge growth over the past year and has exciting opportunities ahead of it," Roper added. "The company knows how to choose compelling IPs that have rich histories such as *Champions* and *Star Trek*. I'm looking forward to working with the team."

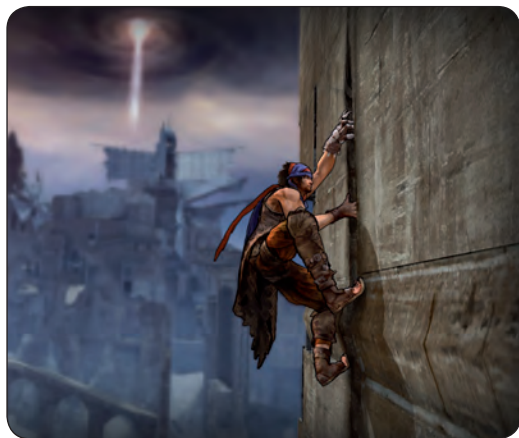


SPORE HITS AN ALL-TIME HIGH

We're not quite sure how this happened, but it turns out that in a recent article in *Time* magazine that ran down the top technology and inventions of 2008, the prolific publication named Will Wright's *Spore* the 20th-best invention of the year. Sure, the game was cool, and had a few nifty features (you know, kinda like every other game out there right now), but as an invention we're not quite convinced it should be ranked up there with the Tesla Roadster and do-it-yourself DNA kits.

DECEMBER RELEASES

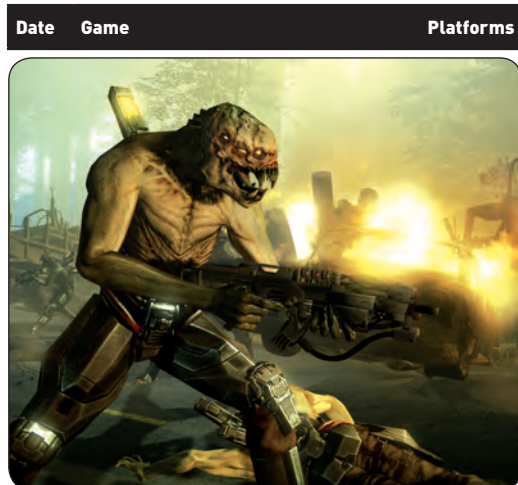
Date	Game	Platforms
7	LittleBigPlanet <i>[Pre-order for R699.95. Save R100!]</i>	PS3
5	Age of Empires	DS
5	All Star Cheer Squad	DS, Wii
5	Back to Barnyard	DS
5	Big Beach Sports	Wii
5	Disney Sing It! High School Musical 3	PS2, PS3
5	Dragonball Origin	DS
5	Dragonball Z: Infinite Worlds	PS2
5	Family Party: 30 Great Games	Wii
5	Grand Theft Auto IV <i>[Pre-order for only R345.56]</i>	PC
5	LocoRoco 2	PSP
5	Pass the Pigs	DS
5	Prince of Persia <i>[Pre-order for only R345.56]</i>	PC
5	Prince of Persia <i>[Pre-order for only R603.86]</i>	PS3
5	Prince of Persia <i>[Pre-order for only R603.86]</i>	360



CORE LAUNCHES LOCAL E-TAILER

If you've only recently jumped on the Nintendo bandwagon and are keen to play catch-up on some of the company's hottest titles, but can't seem to find a store that has stock, then pay attention. www.gamingstore.co.za is a new online retailer specialising in the importing and distribution of not only new Nintendo releases but also those old back-catalogue titles that are often tough to get hold of. They'll import the items for you and send it off to your SA address, cutting out any potential problems with foreign retailers or customs that tend to scare off those keen to buy from the international market.

Subject to change
Release list and special offers provided by www.kalahari.net



5	Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	DS
5	Resistance: Fall of Man 2	PS3
5	Shaun White Snowboarding	PC, PS2
5	SOCOM: Confrontation <i>[Pre-order for only R376.16]</i>	PS3
7	Legend of Kage	DS
7	The Last Remnant	360
7	The Tale of Despereaux	Multi
12	Blokus	PSP
12	Bolt	Multi
12	Damnation	PS3, 360, PC
12	Disney Sing It! High School Musical 3	Wii
12	Disney Think Fast!	Wii
12	Lord of the Rings Online: Mines of Moria	PC
12	Time Hollow	DS
12	Wild Earth: African Safari	Wii
TBA	Looney Tunes: Acme Arsenal	PS2, 360

SLASHING CONTINUES WITH THQ

The latest publisher to join the studio-killing trend we've seen all year is THQ, who has reportedly closed five of its 16 studios across the globe, as well as giving 30 of the 40 employees at Juice games the boot. Sandblast Games, who were working on the next title in the Destroy All Humans series, Helix, Mass Media, LocoMotive Games and Paradigm Entertainment (responsible for the classic Pilotwings 64 and Stuntman: Ignition) have all had their doors closed to help THQ cut costs during the industry's biggest recession in years.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

Coming 5 December 2008



THIS DAY IN GAMING: DECEMBER

1

(1991) SEGA launches the SEGA CD in Japan; it's rather, erm, crap.

9

17

(1988) *Final Fantasy II* is released in Japan, proving that the "fantasy" is a little less "final" than originally thought.



2

(1999) id Software releases *Quake III Arena*; it still dominates as the DM game of choice at NAG.

10

(LAN) DEATH_corp LAN (Cape Town)
www.langames.co.za

18

(LAN) Organised Chaos December
www.langames.co.za

26

3

(1994) The PlayStation is released in Japan; videogaming is changed forever.



19

(LAN) The Merriment LAN (Pretoria)
www.langames.co.za

27

4

(2004) The PSP launches in Japan; consumers are unimpressed by the UMD.

12

(LAN) FRAG LAN showcase (Durban)
www.langames.co.za

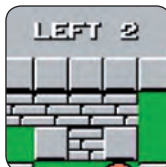
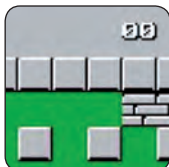
20

(1985) *Bomberman* hits the NES in Japan; circular-blast radii are a thing of the past.

28

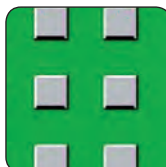
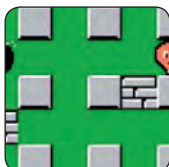
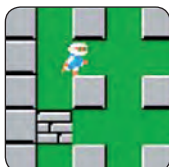
5

(LAN) MPLD XMAS (Pretoria)
(LAN) criXian's Chronicle (Cape Town)
www.langames.co.za



6

(LAN) Mayhem December (Boksburg)
www.langames.co.za



7

15

23

(1997) *Gran Turismo* launches on the PlayStation; sim driving games just became a whole lot prettier.

31

8

(1998) Interplay closes the legendary Black Isle Studios; it takes ten years for the *Fallout* series to recover.

16

24

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to ed@anag.co.za with the subject line [December Caption].



DECEMBER CONTEST
NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:
Ow.

vivendi GAMES



NOVEMBER WINNER

How low can you go,
how low can you...um,
a little help, please!
Duncan Laubscher

RULES: [1] If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. [2] If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. [3] Obey all posted speed limits. [4] Never run with scissors. [5] There is no spoon. [6] Don't tell me what I can't do!

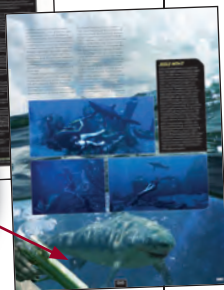
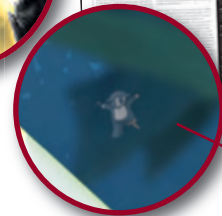
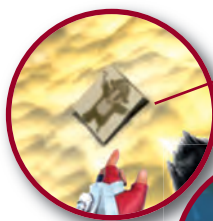
BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Find the Badger! He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to ed@anag.co.za with the subject line [December Badger]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a limited-edition Badger T-shirt from Gamer Gear. www.rudra.co.za



LAST MONTH'S WINNERS

Geoff Raikes, p18
Chris Erlangsen, p45



R603.86



R603.86



R345.56

kalahari.net
PC | Wii | PS3 | XBOX 360

Miktār's Meanderings



by Miktār Dracon

Working In The Garden: Just Like Viva Piñata!

NO, IT'S FKING NOT.** No game exists that accurately portrays the hideous, sweaty experience of rummaging around in terra firma. Oh, the task was innocent sounding enough: dig a 20m trench from the water pump near the shed to the barn to run a water pipe to the new larger water tank housed inside the barn itself. We got a bigger water tank so that more than one person can have a hot shower this winter. The trench had to be 2m deep, so that the water pipe is below the frost line, as clouds poop white flakes of 'holy-divinity-that-is-cold' in this part of the USA when it gets cold enough. The deadline was set a few days from the project's start, due to frost already creeping into the ground.

The initial trench digging was easy enough. We rented what can only be described as a giant chainsaw attached to tank treads, specially made for attacking the earth and ripping it 'a new one'. That part was fun. *Viva Piñata*'s floating-shovel deity has nothing on the Giga-Saw. Much like a chainsaw hitting, well, anything, the earth-chainsaw left an unholy mess. Part two of 'Operation Garden Trench' involved clearing the Giga-Saw dirt poop out of the trench using trusty shovels and manpower.

Yours truly was the manpower, and much like most forms of manpower, the output is inversely proportional to the work that remains to be done. Bravado, chutzpah and ignorance fuelled the initial gusto of clearing the trench (which really only involved shovelling light, fluffy dirt and feeling manly about it). About halfway down the line, an eight-month-old German Sheppard insisted on investigating what's inside my mouth, by shoving his nose into my face – I could smell that he'd been eating his own land minds. Doctor Faust, while not a cute piñata, but still cute in his own way, lives a life tethered to the centre of the garden where the apex of his circumference was close enough for him to examine me, my task and make a general jumpy-mud-covered nuisance of himself. He remains the only dog thus far that I believe can shatter bones and cure cancer with his 'sonic bark'.

Then a discovery was made. Apparently, this property was built on top of an ancient burial ground: the remaining quarter of the

trench revealed the peaks of huge rocks that the earth-chainsaw only moderately scratched, then covered with its own dirt poop. No problem... the sections of the waterline forced above the frost line by these rocks will be extra-insulated to keep our water flowing.

By this point, however, having been whittled down by clay-like sections of earth, constant harassment by dog, tricky digging around submerged, active gas lines, power cords and yet more rock, the manpower was starting to run low. What little solace I had came from knowing that while I toiled away outside in the harsh elements, my properties in *Fable 2* continued to make me ample virtual gold with which I intend to buy the virtual favour of several virtual denizens of Albion to take them to my virtual home(s) and have virtual (protected) intercourse with them. All in the name of the way it's meant to be played, of course.

The disparity between reality and everything else – as with the difference between the *Pokémon*-filled 'green thumbery' of *Viva Piñata* and the cold, hard truth of dirt – is heavy and filled with earthworm poop; a disparity of sad, wistful longing that we may one day have the ability to transfer our consciousness to virtual constructs of our choosing. After all, consciousness appears to be nothing more (and yet nothing less) than a unique energy pattern suspended in the 'electro-colloidal matrix' of our grey, mush neural net, constrained and confined, but not impossible to move along [insert future techno-babble here] until it comes to rest in a new supporting (USB-powered) infrastructure that provides all that it (we) needs for continued existence.

Trippy trans-humanism aside, *Viva Piñata* ill prepared me for the aftermath of such extracurricular activities: blisters, back pains and suspicious-smelling, dirt-covered shoes that give the cat an odd shoe fetish. Perhaps now that I'm in America, I should sue Rare for their misrepresentation of heavy-duty garden work. That'd pay for my physiotherapy. Oh wait, Rare is based in the UK. Well, that explains a lot. **NAG**



Trippy trans-humanism aside, *Viva Piñata* ill prepared me for the aftermath of such extracurricular activities: blisters, back pains and suspicious-smelling, dirt-covered shoes that give the cat an odd shoe fetish.



NANOWRIMO

This year I've finally decided to bite the bullet and will be participating in the National Novel Writing Month (<http://www.nanowrimo.org/>), which starts on 1 November. The goal: write a 175-page (50,000-word) novel by midnight, 30 November. That amounts to about 1,600 words per day, which incidentally would be like writing a four-page NAG feature daily. The region list thus far shows that over two hundred South African participants have signed up. I'm wishing you all the best of luck! If you see me online, ask me how my novel is going so I can feel guilty about not having written as much as I should have.

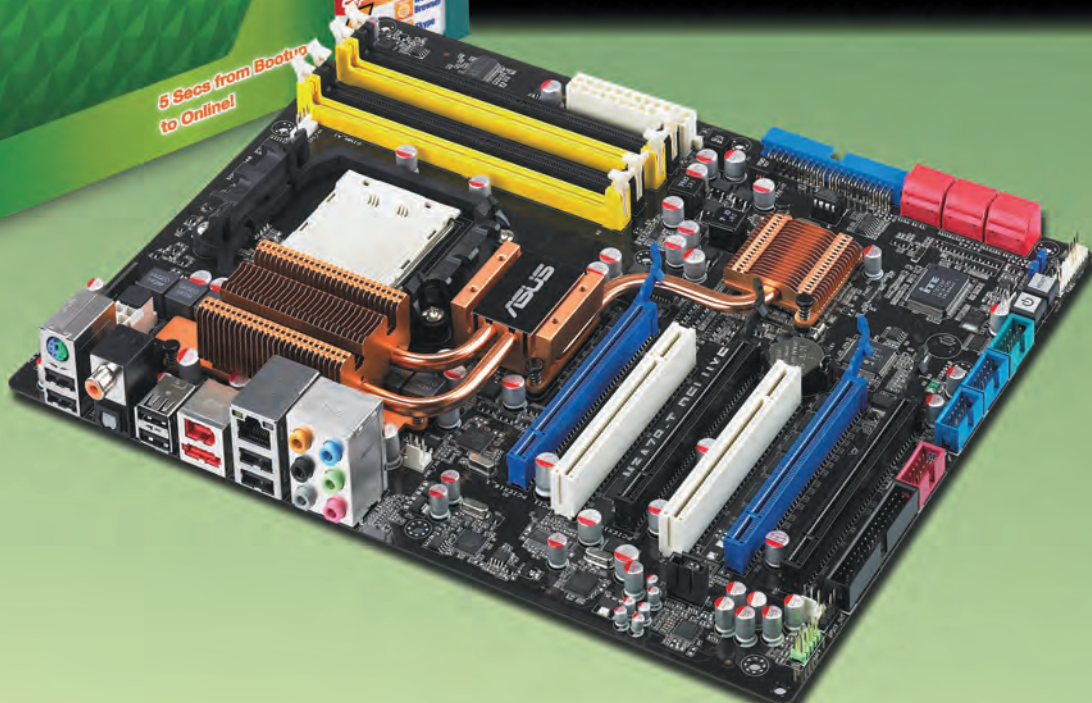
ASUS M3A79-T DELUXE

All-in-one Solution for Extreme Overclocking Potentials



The new ASUS M3A79-T DELUXE is a motherboard capable of delivering higher overclocking, better graphics and fast Internet access. Integrated with the latest AMD 790FX/SB750 chipset that provides an innovative new power design to support 140W powered CPUs, the M3A79-T DELUXE features HyperTransport™ 3.0, quad PCIe 2.0 x16 slots; and ATI Quad CrossFireX™ and AMD OverDrive™ (AOD) support. Additionally, the innovative ASUS Precision Tweaker 2 offers ultimate overclocking potentials with meticulous 0.02v adjustment per step for the NB, SB and DRAM voltages - working in tandem with the AMD AOD for customized overclocking settings in Windows for greater performance tuning margins. This motherboard also incorporates the ASUS Express Gate, which only takes 5 seconds* to go online from bootup without entering Windows for excellent entertainment options; and utilizes only the highest quality power components like: low RDS (on) MOSFETs, Ferrite core chokes, and most importantly 100% high quality Japan-made conductive polymer solid capacitors for higher power efficiency, better stability and lower temperatures for the best overclocking results while providing longer component lifespans.

*Actual boot time is subject to hardware configurations and product models.



Dammit



by Megan Hughes

Money Talks

BEFORE I EVEN START with my usual monthly ramblings, I feel the need to mention how utterly and fantastically awesome *rAge* 2008 was. If you somehow did not manage to make it at all this year, I pity you. Seriously. Whatever next year may bring (and we'll all be finding that out shortly), there is absolutely no doubt that I'll be booking a flight and making my way to *rAge* 2009. To all the guys and girls who put in their blood, sweat and tears to make it happen, know that the effort is deeply appreciated.

Now back to those ramblings. The world economy might have, in recent months, been on the verge of a catastrophic collapse, giving millions of South Africans stomach ulcers and sleepless nights from the stress of it all, but this has not stopped the world from turning (to the surprise of many, I expect). And with the endless spinning of our planet comes the inevitable change of the season, bringing with it both the promise of hot, sunny afternoons as well as the most expensive event of the year: Christmas.

Naturally, all buildings faintly resembling a shop of sorts have been hinting at its imminent arrival since October (with epilepsy-inducing lights hung from every corner and mince pies piled sky high), urging you to spend, spend, spend. As if there was any money left in the bank anyway.

And when faced with the enormity of the costs of upcoming months, one might be tempted to throw in the proverbial controller and hang up the proverbial keyboard. While we have always understood a gaming hobby to be expensive, a luxury not everyone can afford, there are actually a few good reasons that this holiday season might not be as expensive as you might have expected.

Recent price cuts of the Microsoft Xbox 360, for one, will have many gamers grinning all the way to their local stores and home; especially if, like me, you have been a bit too cash strapped of late to afford to join the hoards of console owners. If you do have the spare cash, the Xbox 360 Arcade is now, crazily enough, the cheapest current-generation console available in South Africa at just under

two grand (a price only slightly higher than what you would pay for a new PlayStation 2 and near half what the Nintendo Wii now costs). Even the Xbox 360 Premium, at R2,700, costs a fair bit less than the Nintendo Wii.

And if the rumours of price increases on console games are holding you back from taking the plunge and making the purchase, just remember that there are always "pre-played" titles available from various outlets, as well as the option to rent from quite a few video stores. If your friends have the same console, then you can always swap games amongst yourselves. Because that's what real friends would do. Seriously.

Another reason not to give up on gaming just yet is that we have just entered the legendary 'Christmas sale' season, where you can get almost any game for a brilliant price just by keeping your ear close to the ground. With some savvy shopping, you can pick up classic titles from as little as R50, while other, newer titles may be half their original price.

But if you're still pleading student poverty, then this is the perfect opportunity to get yourself a decent holiday job and earn the money yourself. Most restaurants and many shops need more slaves – I mean employees – during the holiday rush, and the money you earn can just be put straight back into your gaming hobby.

And then, of course, there is always the option of begging friends and/or relatives for the particular title that you can't afford. This method, however, doesn't come with any guarantee, and you're often expected to be nice to the friend or relative who gives you the gift you requested.

Having said that, it does indeed look like it is going to be a very merry Christmas for gamers after all. **NAG**



When faced with the enormity of the costs of upcoming months, one might be tempted to throw in the proverbial controller and hang up the proverbial keyboard.



Please be *Far Cry 2*... or *Fallout 3*... crap. More socks from grandma...

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OPP/FSC 8020

FUJITSU COMPUTERS
SIEMENS

Ramjet



by Walt Pretorius

Cultivating Gamers

THE FUTURE OF GAMING is becoming obvious, and it isn't one that hardcore gamers are going to like. See, for many years now, the gaming industry has catered more for the hardcore crowd, almost entirely ignoring the wants and needs of a very large demographic: the non-gamers.

Just to qualify, before I go on: I use the term non-gamers to describe people who don't obsessively froth at the mouth whenever videogames are mentioned. These are not people who read every bit of information that they can find about upcoming games. These are not people who pre-order titles three years in advance and flail themselves in desperate agony when they are delayed. These are not people who spend every moment thinking about playing games. These are not people who think *Counter-Strike* is cool (although this last group hardly qualify as human at all). But they are people who play games, believe it or not, and probably in a much healthier fashion than you and me, because they have a little more balance in their lives. They might not be the best gamers out there (which, let's be completely honest, is hardly an earth-shattering failing), but they play games. And more importantly, they buy them. Moreover, just to add even more motivation, there are far more of them than there are hardcore gamers, and they tend to be a little older, too, which means that they have more coins jingling in their pockets. Using the term "non-gamer" is just easier than saying, "Casual gamers who spend less time playing games, but have more money to spend on them, and who outnumber hardcore gamers" every time I want to talk about these people.

These non-gamers are out there, and the gaming industry has finally sat up and said, "Hang on a tick, let's get their money." Remember that this is all about money. It might be about games to you, but even at my lowly level, games are about money. The higher you go, the more money we're talking. And people with more money always have a strange desire to get even more of it.

What this means for the market in general is that more and more casual games will be developed. Almost all the big publishers are doing it now, and consoles like the Wii are just adding accelerant to the conflagration.

Now, before you start wailing, your emo fringe sticking to the cold sweat on your forehead, and those attention-seeking cuts on your arms becoming a real attempt at

shuffling off this mortal coil, think a bit beyond three hours from now: this is a very good thing. See, gaming is a drug, and lighter drugs always lead to the harder ones. Give enough people casual games to play, and you will be breeding a whole mess of new hardcore gamers. These new hardcore gamers will want games that are more complex and more challenging – the kind of thing we like playing – and so, in the not-so-long run, the market will be booming with even more hardcore gaming offerings. And this is the proverbial snowball kind of thing, because as more hardcore gamers erupt onto the market (hopefully without all the nasty habits that the current bunch has), even more non-gamers will join the burgeoning market. One day, if this trend fulfils itself, everyone will be a hardcore gamer. It's a dream, yes, but one that is not that farfetched. You will know that day has arrived when your granny starts replacing letters with numbers in her letters, calls you a noob and brags about her l33t kn1tting skillz.

Okay, maybe everyone becoming a hardcore gamer is a little farfetched, but the fact is that the publishers out there are certainly interested in stimulating the market on a consumer level. And that always means good things for the consumers.

So next time you see a non-gamer struggling through a game that you consider easy, stop bragging (the nastiest hardcore habit) and help them out instead. It will do you, and every other gamer on the planet, a whole lot of good. **NAG**



You will know that day has arrived when your granny starts replacing letters with numbers in her letters, calls you a noob and brags about her l33t kn1tting skillz.

pwned



No Silent Nights This Christmas



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MUSICA
A WORLD AWAITS
This Christmas



Last month's announcement that *Diablo III* won't have LAN play has disappointed quite a few of us on the game. We still want it, just not as much as we did before. *Diablo* aside, though, all we really want for Christmas is some time to sleep and play with all of our new goodies!



Rank	Game	Score
1	December leave	60
2	Some time to play "What We're Playing"	48
3	LAN play for <i>Diablo III</i> /Red Alert 3/etc...	9
4	<i>Diablo III</i> any way we can get it	7
5	<i>Street Fighter IV</i>	6
	<i>F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin</i>	6
7	<i>Mass Effect 2</i>	4
	<i>StarCraft II</i>	4
9	A raise	3
	<i>The Sims 3</i>	3
	<i>Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe</i>	3
	<i>Silent Hill: Homecoming</i>	3
	<i>Dead Space 2</i>	3
	<i>Rock Band 2</i>	3
15	<i>Dungeon Keeper 3</i>	2
	<i>Anno 1404</i>	2
	A New! Improved! Freelancer-style game	2
	PROTOTYPE	2
19	<i>Rage</i>	1
	<i>Prey 2</i>	1
	<i>Dragon Age: Origins</i>	1
	Nintendo DSi	1
	<i>Fat Princess</i>	1
	<i>Final Fantasy XIII</i>	1
	<i>Star Wars: The Old Republic</i>	1
	<i>Halo 3: Recon</i>	1
	<i>Castlevania [Next Gen]</i>	1
	<i>MadWorld</i>	1
	<i>BioShock 2</i>	1
	<i>Alan Wake</i>	1
	<i>Puzzle Quest: Galactrix</i>	1



SECRET SERVICE

Developer→ Tigon Studios | Publisher→ Activision | Genre→ Tactical FPS | Release Date→ Q4 2008

THOSE SNEAKY BLACK SUIT-CLAD guys you always see crowding around presidents and other important people must have it easy: stand around all day, look cool, wear those serious shades and stare menacingly at anyone who so much as twitches in their general direction. Well, easy until their charge isn't being shot at by unscrupulous bad guys and they're forced to retaliate with every bullet at their disposal: which just so happens to be the premise behind Activision's latest title to sneak into the upcoming release list: *Secret Service*.

In this tactical first-person shooter, players take on the role of a Secret Service agent in charge of security during the presidential inauguration in Washington DC. When an "extremist assault" is launched on the capitol, it's time to lose the shades and unleash a hail of gunfire on the enemy in a number of real-world locations, from famous DC landmarks to Air Force One. It's unclear whether

or not the game is a sequel to Activision Value Publishing's 2003 *Secret Service: Security Breach* (which in itself was a sequel to a 2001 title of a similar name), but we're hoping it honours the first game's *Rainbow Six*-esque planning and load-out system instead of *Security Breach*'s 'spawn, kill, loot, repeat' that earned it a rather poor reception as just another FPS.

The game is set to be out before Christmas this year. While few technical details have been confirmed, the publishers are touting it as "a refreshing spin to fans of run-and-gun", although we're somewhat concerned it might get lost among the torrent of triple-A titles gamers will have to choose from between now and January. Still, if it manages to indeed freshen up the genre with tactical gameplay and find a balance between strategy and weaponry, it might just prove to be a winner. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

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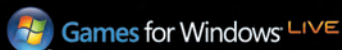
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NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER

FEW FRANCHISES HAVE ACHIEVED the success of Electronic Arts's *Need for Speed* series. For several years now, the IP has thrilled racing fans with excellent arcade-racing action. The original game, called *The Need for Speed*, was released in 1994, bringing with it a new approach to racing titles that was sorely needed at the time, and also went on to launch a number of well-loved games. *Need for Speed* soon became synonymous with PC and videogame racing.

Like any series, *Need for Speed* has seen different incarnations and evolutionary tracks through its impressive run. The biggest change – and indicator of things to come – was the introduction of aggressive police vehicles that would chase down the player's car. This happened in *Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit*, which hit shelves in 1998. The formula was fresh and the multiplayer element, which allowed players to chase each other (one as the cop and one as the 'criminal') was unique, and resulted in the game being something of a hit on the local (and then still fairly new) LAN scene.

The next big step for the *Need for Speed* series was to go underground, taking the fast cars out of the bright light of day and hiding them in the shadowy world of illegal street racing. *The Underground* series all but replaced the *Need for Speed* model, and saw the light of day around a year after the *Hot Pursuit 2*. The game underperformed, and forced

Released in 2003, *Need for Speed: Underground* brought a whole new concept to the series, reinforcing the illegality of the player's actions implemented in *Hot Pursuit*, and allowing the player to explore so-called tuner culture to a greater degree than ever before. The game became about image as much as about speed, and gamers flocked to the idea of ultra-customisation of their vehicles.

The formula stuck, with every subsequent title being a product of the *Underground* evolution. 2005 saw a further reinforcement of the "You're being a bad boy" principle with the introduction of *Most Wanted*, a game that dragged street racing out of the night and into the stark light of day. New techniques and tricks, like the introduction of a bullet-time concept, made for interesting game dynamics, and the subsequent title, *Carbon* (released in 2006), took things even further, with frantic cliff-side boss-challenges thrown into the mix.

The following year, 2007, brought the street-racing concept to a screeching halt. *ProStreet* was released, and while it still followed tuner culture and allowed players a high degree of vehicle customisation, the races were moved to tracks. The idea wasn't particularly well received, and the story behind the game (something which had grown significantly in importance since the release of the original *Underground* title) took a back seat. The game underperformed, and forced





EA to change their strategy.

Need for Speed: Undercover takes the best elements from previous titles in the series and melds them into one whole. It even includes a few tips and tricks from EA's other racing favourite, the irresponsible and much more arcade-style *Burnout* series.

In *Undercover*, the player will take on the part of a cop who is prying into the underbelly of street racing in the game's host city, to try to uncover ties between this illegal activity and others. It seems a more realistic prospect, with the cops no longer seeming to think that illegal street racing deserves a death penalty (like they seemed to in previous games). The game is yanked off the tracks that made *ProStreet* a little bland, and dumped back onto the streets, in broad daylight. It is almost as though the developers felt that they were promoting illegal street racing with their games, and so they decided to release the decidedly more responsible *ProStreet*. Fan reaction forced them to go back to the streets, though, but their justification for doing so is by making the player a good guy trying to bring down all those nefarious tuners.

Whatever their motivations are doesn't really matter, though, because the series is back where it belongs.

In *Need for Speed: Undercover*, the player will be unleashed on a massive, free-form world that borrows ideas from *Burnout Paradise*. Instead of unlocking areas, the player has access to the whole city within the game, and events are started at specific points in that environment. It's a nice idea, although the player will be forced to do quite a bit of exploration to get the full effect of the game. A quick-jump system via the map will be available too, but somehow that just isn't as much fun.

The focus is back on the story, which will be presented via high-quality FMV cut-scenes starring a handful of well-known names, including Maggie Q of *Die Hard 4.0* fame. The story promises to be quite interesting, thankfully, and with more depth than previous titles in the series had to offer.

By entering the various events that are on offer, the player will be able to build up enough of a reputation to get to the guys behind the street racing (and presumably a whole lot of other nasty stuff). Winning races allows for this to happen, but reputation will also be gained by the way the player drives. This is another little "beg borrow and steal" from *Burnout*, but instead of rewarding the player with boost, near misses and the like will add to the player's reputation.

Speaking of races, all the favourites are present. We didn't find any drifts or drags during our hands-on experience (and no real tears will be shed if these events are missing in the final release), but we were certainly intrigued by one of the new race types: highway racing. These will present the player with high-speed, chase-style races through fairly heavy traffic. Using a default 'bumper camera' view, the player will need to negotiate the traffic, hurtling down the highway in an attempt to build up enough of a lead to win before the allotted time runs out.

A 'heroic driving' engine has been built into the game, to help the player out in stickier situations, but it is not different from the time-slowing system used in *Most Wanted* to really be considered a significant change.

The cops are back, too, and this time they're out with a vengeance. Being an undercover cop won't get the player any points with local law enforcement (if they all knew he was a cop, what good would going undercover be?). They will be hunting the player down with extreme prejudice, and a number of AI improvements make them far more effective at taking the player down.

This idea is supported by improved physics and handling. Not only will players see an improvement in these fields, but more realism too. The game will still not feel quite like a nuts-and-bolts racer, but there is a little less 'arcade' in this offering. Supporting this realism is the fact that all those bright, flashing lights that indicated routes in previous versions have been replaced by crash barriers and the like, making spotting the direction of the track a little trickier. Not as tricky as rival *Midnight Club's* system of checkpoints, but still not as obvious as a glaring neon arrow saying, "Go that way."

Supported by cutting-edge graphics, the game will feature the customisation that has become something of a *Need for Speed* signature. Although the series has never been accused of being overly realistic (in fact, we've heard more than a few nuts-and-bolts racing fans call it little more than an arcade racer), the renewed damage model, which showed great promise in *ProStreet*, will make the cars look 'wonderfully bad' after mishaps. Cars you will invariably be trashing on the streets of the fictional Tri-Bay area (which, by the way, will feature around 80 miles of roads) include the Audi R8, BMW M6 and Lexus IS-F. They won't break, but they will look really sorry for themselves.

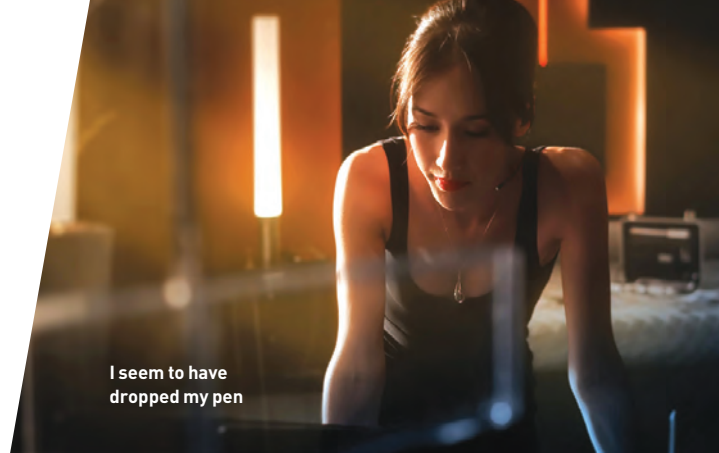
The abovementioned customisation doesn't happen at an in-game location though. The player can, at any time, use a menu-driven system for vehicle customisation. This does remove the frustration of trying to find a parts shop, but it will also result in a bit of a disconnection from the otherwise real feel of the title. New cars, by the way, will be earned rather than bought. Doing a good job means that the cops the player will be working for will hand him a new pink slip.

EA is taking a step back (which is coincidentally also a step in the right direction for this franchise) with *Undercover*, moving the action back to the wrong side of illicit and bringing back the aggressive law-makers that have been an occasionally recurring theme in the series for the last ten years. *Need for Speed: Undercover* looks very promising, and fans are hoping for solid improvements over both *Carbon* and *ProStreet*. These improvements look likely as the racing market competition heats up - EA is determined to keep this racing series in pole position.

And just in case you're wondering, EA CEO John Riccitello has let slip that there will be more driving action coming in the future. A new title, codenamed *Need for Speed XIII*, is already in development apparently, and will hopefully see the light in 2009.

For now, though, fans of the series are waiting for *Undercover*, in the hopes that previous glories and high-points will be recaptured. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERCOVER



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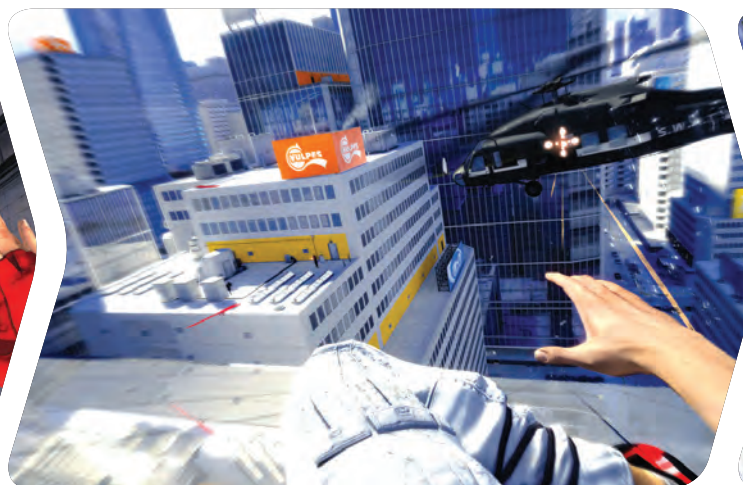
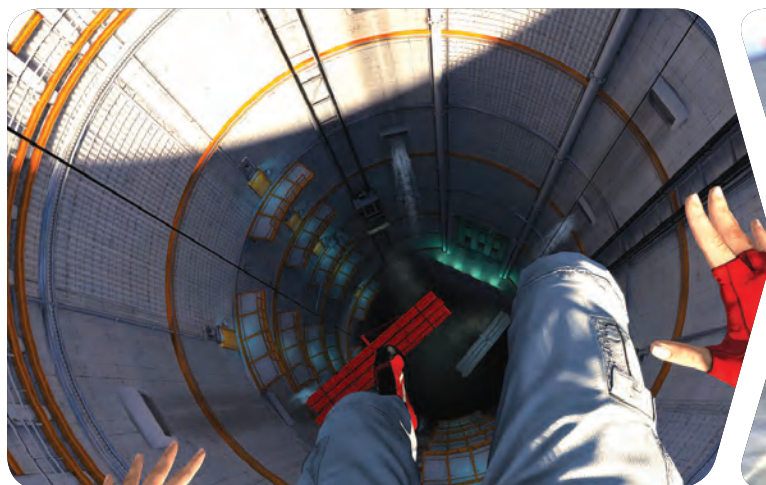
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Look & Listen
For the Fans



MIRROR'S EDGE

EVERY NOW AND THEN, a game comes along that tries to do something different. It's often a case of genre classification that pigeonholes games into the same tired, boring, repetitive mechanics we've seen over and over again. Perhaps the biggest culprit of that pigeonholing is the first-person shooter; we've seen it all before: run, gun, jump, and die - you know the one. Let's face it; despite incredible advances in technology and a plethora of nifty little features in modern games, there's seldom any genuinely innovative gameplay... that unique spark that makes people sit up and pay attention. Thankfully, that's all about to change, and it'll be EA's Swedish development studio, DICE, the chaps responsible for the *Battlefield* series, to bring this innovation to the table.

To help this first-person platformer break free from its mould is Faith: a runner in the sterile, cold, militant future city the game's story unfolds in. As a runner, Faith's job is to get contraband goods and equally outlawed

messages from one point in the city to another, using the metropolis' thousands of rooftops, factories, corridors, sewers and construction sites as her passage of choice. All is not well in the future utopia, however, as Faith soon uncovers a messy frame-job against her law-upholding sister. She must use her skills and underground network to unravel the mystery behind the conspiracy, all the while getting herself deeper and deeper in danger.

With a straightforward storyline and juicy *Samurai Jack*-esque cut-scenes to blend the levels together, just how will the game actually play? Oddly enough, the developer's summary is spot-on in this regard. "No more restrictions, no more being blocked by simple barriers such as walls and fences. We want to enable the player to move like a real person, with the ability to run, jump, vault and slide in a way that has never been seen before in a first-person game." It might sound a little idealistic, but it's true. When faced with the challenge of "Go there,



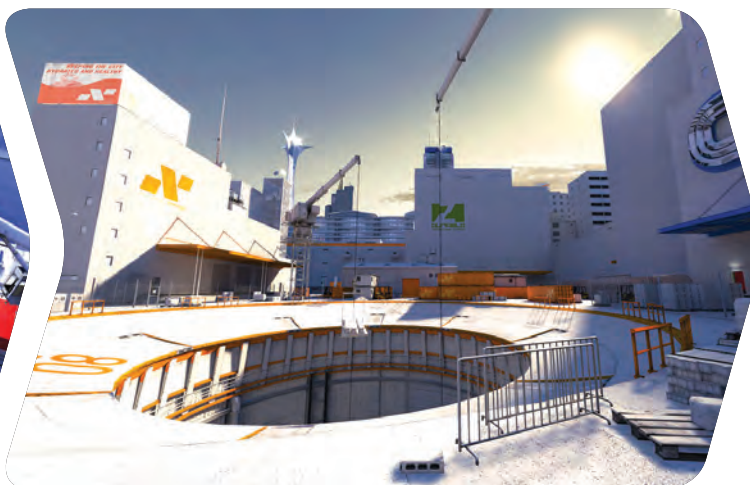
don't die," it's up to the player to decide how they do so. From simple chain-link fences to entire buildings, there's almost always a choice involved in how you deal with the obstacles in your way. Although the player's progression through the story and levels alike is largely linear, there's an illusion of almost sandbox open-endedness that brings the city to life: players genuinely feel like they're navigating through the massive city, a package to deliver, enemies at their backs... they're making all the choices. Through the ever-versatile Unreal 3 Engine, the physics and trigger areas for those split-second catches are forgiving enough to let players explore the paths before them with confidence.

Of course, all those fancy moves wouldn't be quite so cool if you had no one to show them off to. Enter Race Mode, a (predominantly) online mode in which players from around the world compete to see who can get the best runs on a number of rooftop tracks. These tracks,



COMPOSITION WITH YELLOW, BLUE AND RED

Aside from the snazzy gameplay elements, perhaps the most noticeable thing about *Mirror's Edge* is its art direction. Clearly influenced by the 'De Stijl' art movement of the early 1900s, the game uses liberal amounts of stark white and pale blues for the majority of its environments, contrasted at almost every turn by massive splashes of vibrant oranges, greens and blues. Red, the 'runner's colour', is used to identify key areas of passage and preferred areas from which to leap. Darting across a barren white cityscape, smashing through a bright red door, then hurtling yourself down a lime green corridor is commonplace in the game, and the constant assault on a player's senses keeps them alert and deeply immersed in the action, crafting a truly believable game world.



or playgrounds, will involve tight turns, precision movement and continued refinement if you plan to beat them and the thousands of players online. While there unfortunately won't be simultaneous races, you'll go up against the red ghost figures of your rivals, drawing comparisons with games like *TrackMania*.

Mirror's Edge is the kind of game that, while likely to have a large appeal, might not be everyone's cup of tea. It has an old-school, 'keep at it 'til you nail it, and spend a lot of time falling to your death in the meanwhile' feel to it that reminds me of the original *Prince of Persia* and to an extent the *Megaman* series. It combines the best elements of platformers and first-person shooters beautifully, but might frustrate the impatient or less dedicated players out there. Time will tell just how the market treats this potential gem, but from what we've seen so far, this first part in the trilogy will be the start of something great. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

I LIKE TO MOVE IT

With a repertoire fit to rival the Prince of Persia's, Faith's moves are awesome to behold, exciting to perform and oddly believable at times. The key element of her movement is fluidity. When you get up to speed and comfortable with the controls, you'll be amazed at the ease at which you perform some of the incredible manoeuvres. Whether she's bounding along a wall, sliding under a drainpipe or shimmying across a narrow ledge – a hundred-foot drop just inches away – Faith's moves always look and feel just right. Things are no different in combat; the petite athlete that Faith is, she relies on cunning and surprise more than all-out warfare to deal with the (many) gun-toting government employees out to get her. While she's certainly not afraid to nab a sniper rifle or pistol and take care of business with the best of them, the appeal of armed fighting wanes quickly when you realise that, most of the time, you don't need guns to get the job done. According to the developers, there are only two parts in the whole game where you have to use guns; the rest of the time, bare knuckles and careful timing are good enough to keep you alive and moving.





Super nipple
twister
attack!

You wouldn't!



MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

IN THE 16 YEARS that *Mortal Kombat* has been around, it is surprising that there was never a crossover title featuring characters from other popular franchises. Part of this is probably because *Mortal Kombat* has always been very different in not only its play dynamic, but also in its universe to the other games. Finding a plausible plot to bring *Mortal Kombat* to any other universe would have proven to be more than challenging.

With that said, *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* is the first crossover title in the series, featuring some of the most well-known characters in the DC universe, including Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman and others. The premise of the story is that there has been a collision between the two universes, triggered by some magic that makes it possible for the characters to do battle against one another. This plot makes it possible for Midway to tone down some of the abilities of the superheroes from the DC universe to create a more balanced game

that would not see Superman being virtually unstoppable.

Environmental interactions in fighting games are not new, but rarely become anything other than multi-stage battles or juggling characters against walls. *MK vs. DC* brings a new meaning to interactive environments. Players can not only battle in the air during transitions from one area of a stage to another (dubbed "free fall Kombat"), but they can push each other through walls, inflicting massive amounts of damage in "Test your might" games. These additions to the gameplay can turn the tide, either making it end very quickly or giving some breathing room to a player who was being pummelled. An interesting "Klose Kombat" mode pulls the camera in and allows players to inflict specific damage to the face or upper body of the challenger. This mode changes the game speed and just as with "free fall Kombat", is capable of transforming the game for the player.

While we previewed the game using test code, the fighting system is possibly the

HANDS ON



TESTED

best to come from the minds at Midway. It rewards proficiency and well thought-out strategies without turning into an attack timing frenzy that many modern fighter games suffer from. The pace is seemingly slow at first, but that's what gives it longevity and allows the player to develop a unique fighting style unique to each character. Every character is authentic and true to their history, be it from the DC or MK universe. The graphics come courtesy of the Unreal 3 Engine, and allow incredible detail making it the best-looking game in the series by far.

For the dedicated and purist *Mortal Kombat* fans, this may be a little too different from the previous games, but *MK vs. DC* is a breath of fresh air, which could possibly bring new players to the franchise (who may have been put off previously by the multiple-style and weapon-based fighting in the older games). *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* may possibly be the most refined *Mortal Kombat* game ever developed.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

WRATH of the LICH KING

E X P A N S I O N S E T

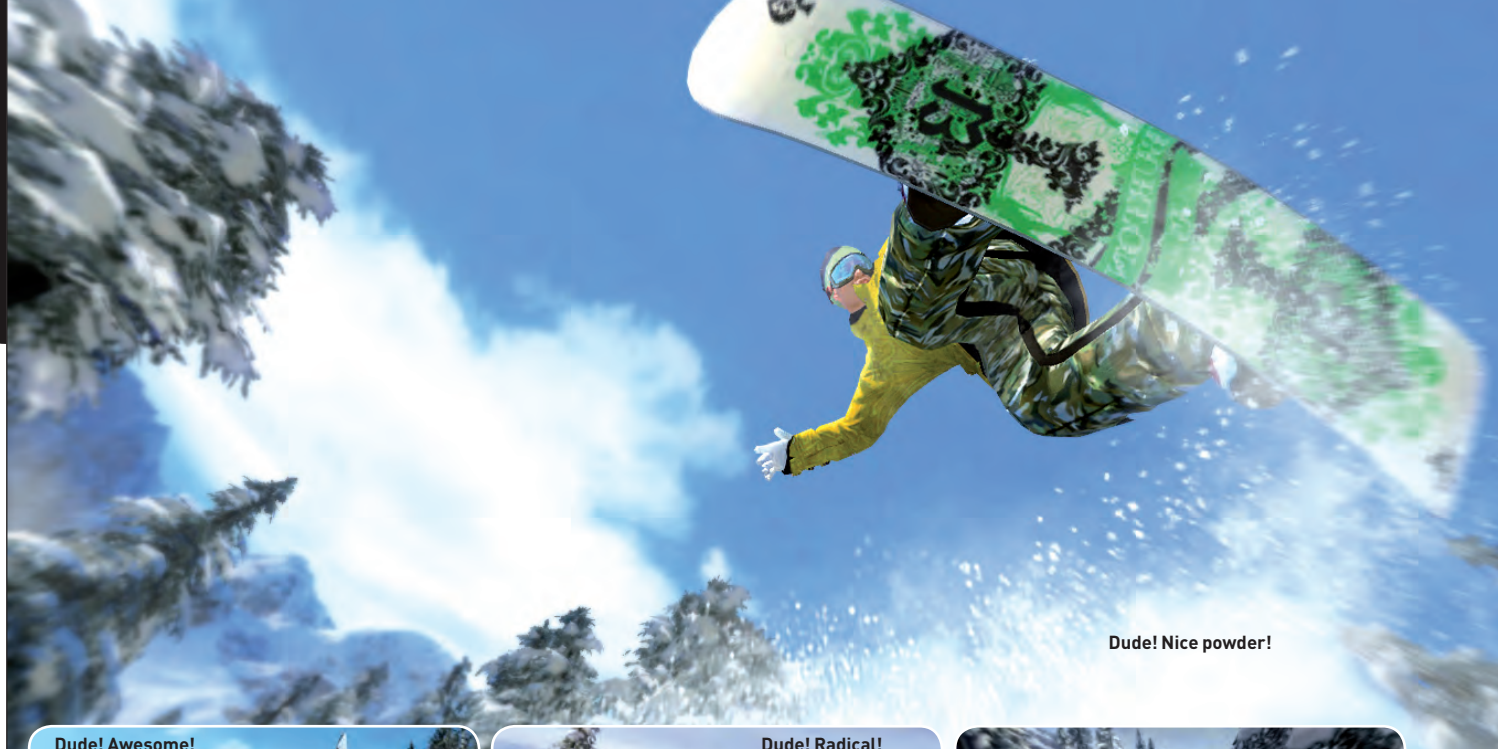


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Dude! Nice powder!



Dude! Awesome!



Dude! Radical!



Dude! Smooth!

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

OPEN-ENDED, OR 'SANDBOX', GAMES are all the rage these days, giving players the freedom to go where and when they choose. Of course, certain genres are exceptionally well suited to this type of gameplay. Sports games are no exception, letting players explore their course and find those hard-to-reach unlocks and secret missions – which is exactly what *Shaun White Snowboarding* focuses on. Developed by Ubisoft Montreal and sporting some of the best-looking slopes you've ever seen, thanks to the finely-honed Scimitar Engine, *SWS* is all about freedom: give the player a board and a mountain, and let them take care of the rest.

Starting off with a simple character-customisation process, players can choose to kit their snowboarder out with a wide range of gear: pants, goggles, jackets – you name it. Everything has been expertly designed to enhance the feeling of realism. Once you've created your perfect avatar, you'll have access to four massive slopes from across the globe, each hosting a

range of features from natural half-pipes to rickety wooden bridges with everything in between. If it's on the slopes, you can ramp off it, grind it, or, as may often be the case, fall through it. Players can choose to start boarding from virtually any part of the slope, travelling to their destination on a chopper, the more pedestrian ski lifts, or, for the first time I can think of, on foot. Feeling risky? Take a chopper to the summit and plough down the icy cliffs at breakneck speeds. In the mood for something a little more sedate? No sweat: kick off the board, grab a friend and spend a few hours throwing snowballs at the locals.

Each location in *SWS* will have dozens of challenges, collectable tokens and unlocks for you to find, many of them catering for the adventurous multiplayer mode. When online, players will be able to drop in and out of their friends' games at will, joining their party for a few speed runs down the half-pipe or taking up a bet using in-game currency to see who can grab the most collectables within

HANDS ON

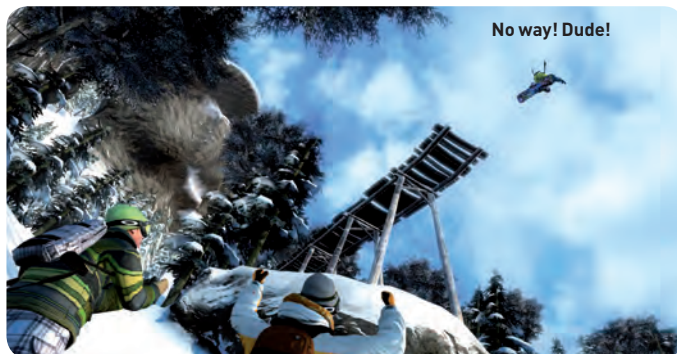


TESTED

a certain time. The developers really have gone out of their way to recreate the feeling of spending a day at the slopes with your buddies, making the gameplay as casual or as structured as you choose. The multiplayer is designed to integrate seamlessly into the single-player, encouraging players to team up with their friends for an hour or so while they're hunting objectives to unlock that next very special beanie.

While one can't quite say just how successful *SWS* will be, it puts forward an interesting game dynamic that's sure to secure a following. The idea of cruising the slopes, looking for people on your friends list, adds a personal quality to the system that's often lacking in multiplayer games these days; and a decent level of character customisation combined with solid, locked-content, objective-based gaming is a proven formula. Stay tuned for this one: it might just be the game to get you out of the skate park and on the 'powder'. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



No way! Dude!



Dude!

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING



Quake III Arena falls a few notches on our list this month, while *Call of Duty 4* makes strong gains. Newcomers *Far Cry 2*, *Fable 2*, *Fallout 3* and *Dead Space* all debut in the top five. Once we all get our hands on *Guitar Hero: World Tour*, expect it to top the charts!



Rank	Game	Score
1	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	18
2	Far Cry 2	15
3	Fable 2	11
	Fallout 3	11
5	Dead Space	10
	Quake III Arena	10
	Gears of War 2	10
8	Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	9
	Call of Duty 5: World at War Multiplayer Beta	9
10	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	6
11	Soul Calibur 4	5
	Tom Clancy's EndWar	5
	Grand Theft Auto IV	5
14	Guitar Hero: World Tour	4
	Same Game	4
	Fracture	4
	Ninja Gaiden II	4
18	C&C: Red Alert 3	3
	Tomb Raider: Underworld	3
	Nox	3
	Burnout Paradise	3
	Need for Speed: ProStreet	3
	Crysis	3
24	Warhammer Online	2
	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	2
	Word Twist	2
	World of Goo	2
	Gran Turismo 5 Prologue	2
	Street Fighter 3: Third Strike	2
31	Heroes of Might & Magic V	1
	Rock Band	1
	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	1

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Where to get it, what it costs and who you need.

PC SPEC: Our rating for the hardware requirements of games is space age. Check the box on the other page.

GAME NAME: This end up. The bit you tell your friends. The bit you remember – with your brain!

AWARDS: Our awards mean something: it means we agreed on a game, which is rare, trust us.



THINK INSIDE THE BOX

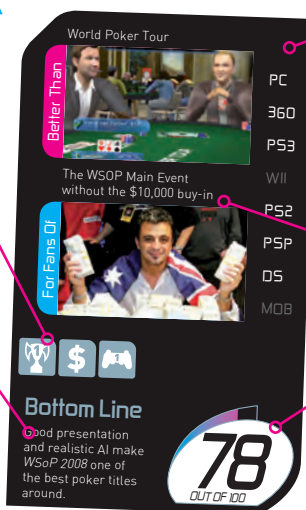
ICONS: It's just like a super-ultra mini-review: you just glance and learn!

BOTTOM LINE: Too many words, not enough pictures? Don't worry – we'll bottom-line it for ya.

PLATFORMS: Check it: new coloured-tabbed system showing which systems the game appears on and which one we reviewed it on.

LIKE, Y'KNOW, STUFF: We try to keep things in perspective using these two blocks.

SCORE: Sometimes it's a number (usually it is). Sometimes it's a picture, or something snarky. We like to mix things up a little.



WEB SCORES

C&C: RED ALERT 3 [PC]

	NAG	73/100
	METACRITIC	84/100
	GAMERANKINGS	83/100

FAR CRY 2 [PC]

	NAG	88/100
	METACRITIC	88/100
	GAMERANKINGS	87/100

DEAD SPACE [360]

	NAG	97/100
	METACRITIC	89/100
	GAMERANKINGS	88/100



THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like.



ACTION: When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.



BABYSITTING: Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.



BITCHIN': When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.



BORING: Grab your blankie and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.



BUGGY: Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.



BUTTON MASHER: Using only the power of your manly thumb, you can beat this game, Button Masher.



CASH-IN/LICENSE: Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.



CINEMATIC: Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.



CLONE: We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.



CO-OP: It is dangerous to go alone. Take this. A friend. Water with cooperation for Co-op Attack.



COMPETITIVE: You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.



FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? It's Foreign!



MULTIPLAYER: The maximum number of people who can play per copy of the game.



ONLINE: For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.



PARTY: Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.



PIECE OF POO: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.



STUPID PEOPLE: Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.

WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

- Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual/quad-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**
- Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**
- Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**
- Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**
- You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**

NAG AWARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE: If a game boasts this award, it means everyone in the office agrees that the game rocks. Serials.

MUST PLAY: The thing about the Must Play award is that it can happen anywhere, with any game, good or bad. Somehow, you must play this game.



DISTRIBUTOR LIST

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If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

THE REVIEWERS

While the NAG reviewers are snug in their beds waiting for Santa to appear via a portal and leave presents under the file-server with its festive blinking lights, we snuck a peek at what they requested for Christmas.

MIKTAR DRACON

What I want for Christmas:

For people to reply to emails, even when they don't want to. A life-sized stuffed-animal of Bowser, with RedTide-killing kung-fu action. And a 1:1 ZAR to USD exchange rate.



WALT PRETORIUS

What I want for Christmas:

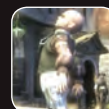
There is nothing I could want, that would surpass what I already have. But a million bucks in cold hard cash wouldn't be too bad of a start. I don't believe in Santa Claus anyway.



DANE REMENDES

What I want for Christmas:

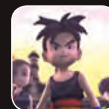
I want a pony, a lifetime supply of dental floss and increases to my Luck and Perception attributes. The "Jinxed" perk from *Fallout 2*. To find a ball gag in my inventory after losing an arm-wrestling competition with a Mutant.



TARRYN VAN DER BYL

What I want for Christmas:

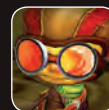
A ballistics helmet and goggles for when I play shooters. I'd also like those nice people over at Oxford to add the word "phoreals" to their lovely range of dictionaries, so I can use it in articles.



CHRIS BISTLINE

What I want for Christmas:

World peace. Nothing much... [So everyone else decided you obviously need more perspective. So we're sending you to Afghanistan with this nice hat saying, "loinfidels? no u!"]



MICHAEL JAMES

What I want for Christmas:

A miniaturised Necromorph in an aquarium. If they can come up with Stasis and Kinesis modules, they can come up with a Shrinking Ray. Come on, science, we're really rooting for you over here.



ADAM LIEBMAN

What I want for Christmas:

Every single PlayStation 2 game ever made, and a puppy, and life-sized robotic horse that can be ridden on the moon. I shall call him cake. We shall be best friends, and go on fantastic adventures together.



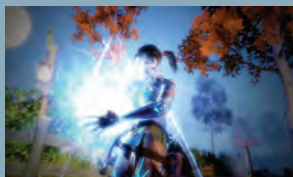
GEOFF BURROWS

What I want for Christmas:

World peace and a sub-orbital weapons platform with ion cannons so I can be the one to bring great and terrible war upon the world once again. I'd have the best Facebook status update EVER!



FABLE II [360]



NAG	86/100
METACRITIC	90/100
GAMERANKINGS	89/100

SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL [PC]



NAG	89/100
METACRITIC	78/100
GAMERANKINGS	75/100

SAINTS ROW 2 [PS3]



NAG	85/100
METACRITIC	82/100
GAMERANKINGS	83/100



RRP→ R400 | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Distributor→ Electronic Arts South Africa | Genre→ RTS | Age Rating→ 16+ | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

COMMAND & CONQUER[®] RED ALERT 3

The following is a collection of debriefing communiqués between two Allied ranking communiqués between two Allied ranking officers and their command chain, compiled and annotated by Chrono-Archaeologist Ravenski, and in connection with events surrounding the timeline disruptions chronicled by Electronic Arts in late 2008 under the title *Red Alert 3*. Most of the material contained herein has been assembled from report excerpts recovered from the Allied-dominated timeline, issued internally by Commander RAVEN and Sub-commander Barkskin. RAVEN had been active in the field since the outbreak of the first Tiberium War in its particular timeline in 1995, and assiduously fought in all the so-called *Command & Conquer* engagements thereafter. Barkskin became involved a couple of years later, and also fought in all those engagements. While RAVEN commanded more battles in his career (up to that point) than Barkskin, the latter had spent considerably more time on the field itself, in a front-line capacity. This should give us some insight into their differing outlooks, representing both old-school and revisionist mentalities, respectively. Annotations by Chrono-Archaeologist Ravenski are shown in boldface and prefixed with "CAR."

CAR: The following excerpts are presented almost "as is" (aside from my commentary, Comrades), and coupled under headings specifying the category that they are describing at the time. For the sake of legibility, the Sub-commander's reports are reproduced in *italics*, to help distinguish them from the CO's notes. The conflict being alluded to (and which, in fact, sparked these internal reports) was the so-called Third Red Alert ("red" presumably referring to the colour of our glorious flag – or it could refer to the level of hostilities in that war...). It is my opinion that the chrono-manipulators were, in turn, themselves being chrono-manipulated by that powerful agency now known only as "The EA." The EA turned the *Command & Conquer* multiverse on its ear with this particular timeline, engineering some fundamental changes that somewhat resemble those that made *Generals* such a non-canonical departure. I believe that most serious *C&C* enthusiasts are likely to be disappointed by events in the Third Red Alert, which in some ways cannot even be considered a true member of the *Command & Conquer* multiverse. However, there are also many who will be intrigued by it, and by its use of childish primary colours, and rectangular and rectilinear architecture. In fact, Comrades, I believe that those seeking vast options and versatility should look elsewhere, while those who enjoy being somewhat more constrained, who prefer to have boundaries to work within, will thrive on this one. You will notice that the accounts delivered below are from two commanders from that timeline. The junior of the two actually provides a percentage reflecting his involvement level in the chronicled conflict. The

other offers no such quantification (that I have been able to find), so I have calculated, based on clues contained within his choice of words and so forth, a "favourable neural stimulation index."
Commander RAVEN FNS Index: 63%



Personnel

[Barkskin] First of all Sir, I've got to say that Lt. McKenna looks eye-meltingly good in a uniform, which is great, since she's always in uniform. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you personally for assigning her to handling my mission briefings. My mind may have wandered off every time she opened her mouth to give me some "helpful advice", but it sure was entertaining watching her lips move on my tiny briefing view screen.

[CAR: There is no denying that younger commanders may be motivated in such ways.] Anyway, back to the debriefing. Well, seeing as how you sent us off on a suicide mission deep into the heart of Soviet territory (which was coincidentally surrounded by Empire troops - thanks for that), I'm actually surprised that I'm sitting here writing this with all my appendages mostly intact.

My co-commander, Cpl. McBulletmagnet, did an admirable job of following orders: he defended when I told him to go on the defensive, he attacked when I wanted him to and he did an exemplary job of saving me from that rogue bear that parachuted right into my command tent. I think you should award him with a medal or something for failing to live up to his name so admirably. One more thing, we need to check our intel. It seems as though we're up against every B-grade movie actor who has ever graced the small screen in this little war we're waging. It's a bit embarrassing that we're shooting at mildly-famous people when we could be shooting at big-name movie stars.

[RAVEN] Regarding the operational staff we have had at our disposal during the course of this campaign, I have mixed feelings. My sub-commanders have all been admirable (despite Giles's hints at tail-gunning tendencies - aimed in my direction!), but it is the support personnel that I have misgivings about. Firstly, Lt. McKenna **[CAR: or is her name Gemma Atkinson?]** strikes me as being, let us say, not exactly an intellectual giant, which in an intel officer is rather disquieting. Furthermore, she constantly carries about her an air of lost, cute-and-cuddly alarm - not the nerves of steel that we want in our operations centres! I recommend that she be reassigned, perhaps to our recruitment office, where her physical charms may be better put to use. (With regrets, I must here also put her on report for improper conduct toward a superior officer.) As for Agent Tanya, her rich, blonde hair is not suited to covert operations, where it can give away her position. **[CAR: This may be a result of timeline tampering - there is evidence that in other timelines Tanya was, in fact, a brunette.]** Could we not get some smart and deadly looking ladies such as the ones in the Soviet central command? Or perhaps an exotic Oriental beauty...

[CAR: A psychotic American president? That was something of a surprise. The available footage and recordings of internal communications that we have assembled are of a high quality, and indicate very intriguing events, including the interwoven nature of the alternative timelines. Studying these reels, we can clearly see how various decision points result in different causality paths.]

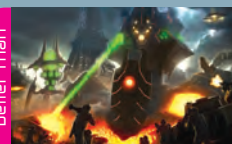


FEATURE: Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3



Universe at War

Better Than



PC
360
PS3
WII

Worse Than



PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



Bottom Line

It's a game that may, with luck, snag some new players, but is likely to miss the mark with many long-time C&C fans.

73
OUT OF 100

Materiel/assets

[Barkskin] I have to ask Sir, why is it that our units look so much less impressive than those of our enemies? I know that we're the Allies. We're supposed to be conservative and that we prefer to sneak around the battlefield rather than going in for full-frontal assaults; but really, those Empire troops came at us with robots that morphed into planes! Sure, it didn't take very long to blow them out of the sky (although that giant mech thing that the troops have been calling the King Oni kind of crashed that party when it showed up), but they sure were pretty. Can't we squeeze some more funds out of the taxpayers so we can get some decent-looking gear? Maybe we could get something that looks like the Soviet Sickie, but is fifty times the size, shoots lasers and can shake up a cracking-good cocktail? After all, if we could intimidate those commie bastards before the fight even starts, they may reconsider screwing with us in the future.

Those Empire troops are incredibly versatile. Who would have thought that they would come at us with things like an anti-air submersible that can be transformed into an air-to-ground bomber? Their lower-tier units don't pack as much of a punch as the Soviet troops do, but they're nigh unstoppable once they've got their high-tech gadgets out on the field (that Shogun

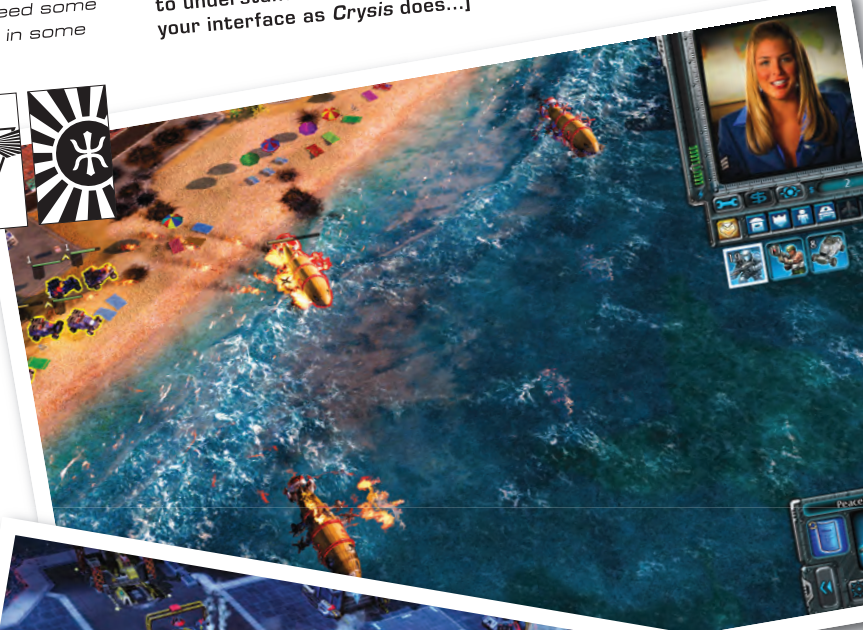
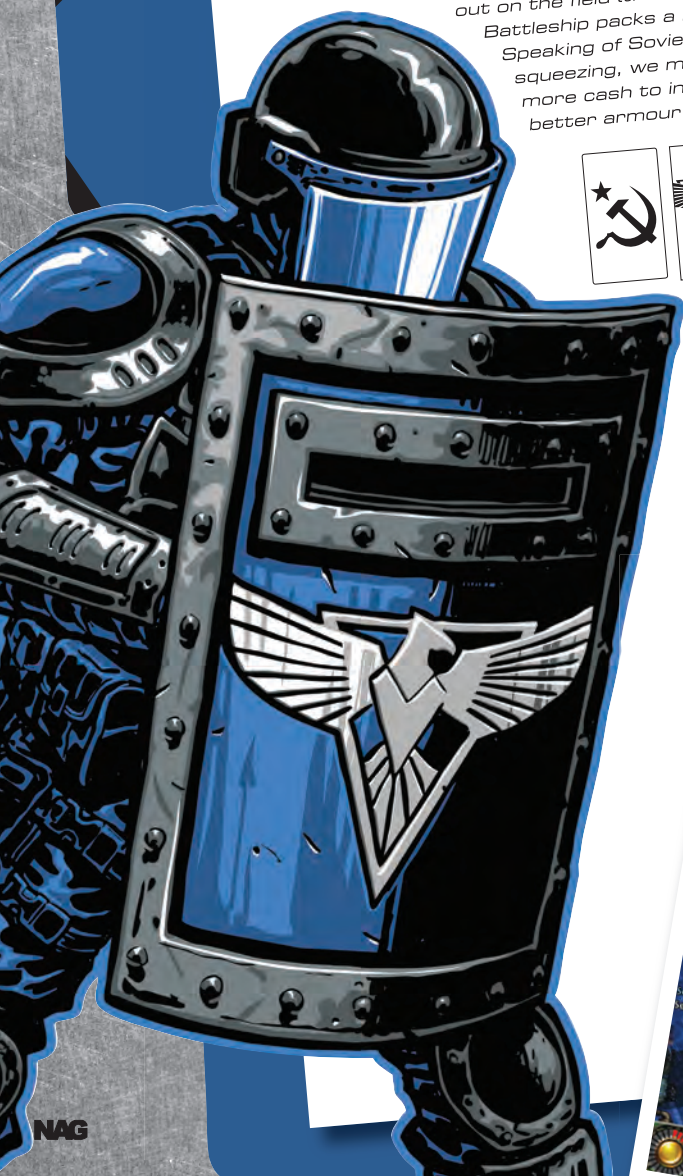
Battleship packs a real punch!).

Speaking of Soviets and taxpayer squeezing, we may need some more cash to invest in some better armour

for our troops. Whenever we pick a fight with those Soviets, they pound us with powerhouses like their Apocalypse tanks and their Kirov airship. And what do we have? We have a tank that can disguise itself as a tree. [CAR: **Actually, this proved to be one of the Allies' most effective units when used correctly.**]

[RAVEN] Sirs, I am not sure what the hell has happened here, but since when do we fight wars with vehicles and units that look like they came out of a Kinder Surprise Egg, or a lucky packet, or something? At least we're not alone in this shocking new "military fashion" - the Soviet units and buildings look like fairground or carnival fixtures such as gumball machines! I find the so-called Apocalypse tanks particularly comical (instead of imposing!), with their rounded, top-heavy shape and bouncing motion. I must say (in jest, please note!) that I was almost tempted to defect to the Empire just because at least their military hardware looks like it means business, rather than like colourful toys! At least our (and, unfortunately for us, our enemies') units generally possess interesting skill-sets and secondary abilities.

[CAR: **Recovered footage reveals that the weapons of that timeline often had impressive, spectacular-looking muzzle flashes and visual side effects.** Despite the strange appearance of that timeline's environments, the action looks great. Still, it is hard to understand how this can demand as much from your interface as *Crysis* does...]



Theatres of war

[Barkskin] I like going to war because it usually means we get to sit around on pretty beaches with some of the prettiest water anyone has ever seen. Seems as though warzones are all about colour these days, but that's a good thing, since it seems to keep troop morale up. **[CAR: Again, younger commanders are motivated differently...]** We lost Pvt. Jenkins because he broke his cover when he stood up to comment on how much he wanted to stay at the beach resort we were fighting near when this war was over, but at least he was happy before it happened. Remember to send word to his mother and reassure her that Jenkins is in a better place now. He's in the giant beach resort in the sky and if our intel is anything to go by, it's beautiful up there...

I hear that next week we're going to be in New York, fighting to stop the commies from blowing up the Statue of Liberty... again... **[CAR: Yes, this landmark has been quite a popular focus in the temporal wrangles between the Allies and the Soviets.]** Well, at least they've prettied the place up a bit over there.

[RAVEN] I'm not sure what happened, but one day I was on the bleak and visceral Tiberium battlefield, then I woke up the next morning and was in this conflict - and the whole environment had changed to colourful, square-looking carnival terrain, with everything lined up on a grid. Did someone put acid in my coffee? Or did I, in my sleep, travel through the looking glass and into wonderland? Primary colours and right angles everywhere. The water, at least, still looks normal. I now know what I will spend my pension on: a yacht, so I don't have to ever see that appalling mainland again! **[CAR: Yes, the water in this particular timeline is uncommonly crisp, clear and vibrant. As for the rest: very strange indeed. I am glad I don't live in that reality: I think my eyes would bleed after a day. Something I was surprised about is the mini-map that these commanders were using: these look extremely antiquated, compared to the rest of their technological level. Flat green and blue to depict land and water, respectively, with no features or topographical details. This anachronistic backwardness also applied to some other elements of the commanders' control interface.]**



FEATURE: Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3



War supply

[Barkskin] I like this new standardised resource system we're working with, Sir. It's reassuring to know that we're likely to always be working with the same amount of funds that our enemies have to play around with. It means that the war isn't determined by who has the most resources, but who makes the best use of the resources available to them. It would make things a lot easier if it were scalable in some way, but in order to do so someone needs to tell the drivers of our prospectors that they need to coordinate their efforts a bit better when they're extracting from those ore mines. [CAR: As it turns out, multiple harvesters on one mine made zero difference to resource gathering rates. This was due to the logistics of the trucks getting in and out of the mine and the warehouse.] Sometimes you just want to bleed those mines for all they're worth [CAR: Unfortunately, not possible.] by assigning twenty prospectors to a single mine, but that's usually more trouble than it's worth.

[RAVEN] Here I must profess deep unhappiness, HQ. [CAR: The Allies had a charming saying in their century: "different strokes for different folks".] With our previous harvesting models, it was possible to variably adjust one's resource-gathering capabilities, and grow incrementally. Now, you get one harvester per mine, and that's it. Firstly, there are no possibilities for subtlety here: it's all or nothing. Secondly, the one harvester is all of that mine's harvesting infrastructure, which means that losing that harvester turns off that entire mine. This forces us to commit heavily to defending the mines. Now, while protecting one's resources is always a good idea, I prefer some flexibility, some options. Command, I strongly recommend we reconsider our resource-gathering approach, as this new one forces us into predetermined sequences of actions, and narrows tactical and strategic options. [CAR: This is quite a strange departure from previous Command & Conquer timelines, except, to some extent, for Generals, which was somewhat poorly received. In fact, this new resource-harvesting method was even more restrictive than the one in the Generals conflict.]

Recreation facilities

[Barkskin] There's something special about rolling into battle with the music blaring, the Hell March drowning out the sound of our fallen troops due to shotguns (and the cries of our fallen troops due to the aforementioned shoddy armour). What's that, Sir? The Hell March is supposed to be exclusive downloadable content for the Soviet troops. Oops... well, we're just going to keep playing it because it's just that awesome.

We're going to have to add a bit of polish to the "invite buddy to join in on the bad-guy shooting" system, because sometimes it just doesn't work. It would also sure be nice if we could

simply send these invites over our local network, rather than over our mobile Internet connection. [CAR: Unaccountably, two commanders operating from the same command building could not coordinate their efforts via a local network connection, but would instead have to link to each other via the global uplink. This seems terribly inefficient, and an infrastructural oversight, considering that the simplest and most effective logistics suggest cooperation from a single centralised location as the optimal setup.]

[RAVEN] I am happy to report that the marching band has been truly excellent. [CAR: The music was composed by Frank Klepacki, who appears to have hooked among the Red Alert timelines.] They have a broad repertoire of marching songs and atmospheric pieces, all of them of excellent quality, and appropriate to the particular mood of the moment. Also, Sirs, I really enjoyed going to the cinema between engagements. Overall, the production quality of those movies was outstanding. In terms of getting the personnel to mingle, however, things have gone less smoothly. It seems that inviting a co-commander is something of a hit-and-miss affair, and I would like to express my hope that this situation can soon be remedied. [CAR: It was quite strange, and disappointing, to see that only up to six commanders could go to war in the same battle, as opposed to the more common, and by then de facto standard of at least eight. This is in contrast to the beauty of two commanders acting in concert to pursue a campaign, which was definitely a plus.] Nevertheless, the troops have managed to maintain fairly high spirits, and I commend these men and women for hanging onto their senses of humour, as evidenced by their comments and quips on the battlefield.



Tactics and strategies

[Barkskin] I can't say it enough: I love this war we're fighting. I hear that we're going to try to hold Brighton Beach next week. The Soviets are rolling into that area and we need to hold it to prevent them from gaining a foothold in England. If you need volunteers, I'm your man. I also heard that the Soviets had tried to assassinate the Japanese Emperor by sending in a bear and a conscript.

[CAR: And, amazingly, would have succeeded, were it not for the fact that the Emperor was not there, but was impersonated by a decoy - clever, those Japanese!]

You've got to love those crazy Russians!

The chaos that is created whenever a Shogun battleship starts shelling an Allied base is right up my alley. It's quite a rush feeling the panic instilled whenever a few of those Kirovs show up on the horizon. I like the pretty explosions that can constantly be seen around the battlefield. Being on the deck of an aircraft carrier as it launches its squadrons of bombers is a remarkable sight, and seeing the enemy scramble as they drop their payload is truly satisfying.

[RAVEN] As expected, the initial stages of the campaign were quite straightforward and not excessively difficult. As my second and I progressed, however, the assignments became more difficult. However, all too often I found that the enemy was throwing us curve balls, not because they made sense, but just to show us something "different." And so, these missions were not satisfyingly challenging, but rather annoyingly difficult. **[CAR: I have measured much chrono-shifting taking place in this regard, particularly in the Empire-dominated timeline. It seems the commanders went back in time to "reset" an operation numerous times, and here we are talking about experienced commanders - veterans of the Command & Conquer alternate realities. Truly, these assignments must have been difficult.]**

Balance of power

[Barkskin] It seems as though we're pretty evenly matched with our enemies. We really lucked out on that, because otherwise things could have gone a lot worse. It's also nice to see the battle tactics of the factions: we're all stealthy (lots of smoke and mirrors - saves me from all those enemy bullets), the Soviets are all about brute force (I still have nightmares about the dual-barrels of the Apocalypse tank) and the Empire is a mixture of the two with all that extra versatility thrown in. It almost feels as though this war was calculated beforehand, as if somebody tweaked our (and the enemies') troops to ensure that this is a fair fight. But that's just crazy talk. That's not really possible... right, Sir? **[CAR: This, in fact, is the basis for my research thesis, Comrades.]**

This war is fun.
Efficiency Rating: 86

[RAVEN] At first blush, it seems that our three warring factions are quite well matched. More is the pity for us - we are having to work for it! **[CAR: Historians and war enthusiasts will, in fact, consider this a good thing, as a one-sided war is one of the most boring and pointless things... in my opinion]** So far, I have failed to identify a unit versatile enough to serve as an all-rounder, which means that we have to mix up our forces to a varied army composition. In other words, no spamming one overpowered unit. On the bright side, this applies to our enemies too, and because

there are two of them to the one of us, overall I would say that this is a good thing. While our and the Soviets' forces are well known to you, the Empire is a new variable; apparently the result of those Russkies tampering with the timeline. Their units are more advanced than anything we have seen so far, and are particularly good at transforming from one role to another. At least in doing so they tend to sacrifice some durability: there is nothing that can't be solved with a judicious application of "shock and awe" firepower, Sirs! **NAG**

Alex Jelagin & Dane Remendes



The background of the entire cover is a composite image. At the top, a close-up of a woman's face (likely the character Kate) is shown in a warm, orange-toned light. Below her is a city skyline at night, with several skyscrapers illuminated. A police helicopter is visible in the upper right sky. In the foreground, a dark red sports car (a Porsche Carrera GT) is shown from a low angle, driving towards the viewer with its headlights on. Behind it, three police cars with flashing blue and red lights are pursuing it. The title 'NEED FOR SPEED' is written in a bold, italicized, sans-serif font, and 'UNDERCOVER' is written in a much larger, bold, italicized, sans-serif font below it. The overall color palette is dominated by oranges, yellows, and blues.

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERCOVER



IN STORES 21.11.08 NEEDFORSPEED.COM



PLAYSTATION 3



PlayStation 2



NINTENDO DS

Wii PC DVD ROM

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VER

*TRUST NO ONE.
OUTRUN EVERYONE.*



www.ea.co.za

The Dunia engine was built by Ubisoft Montreal specifically for *Far Cry 2*. The game also supports amBX, a technology developed by Philips that, when used with the proper hardware, allows for an enhanced audio-visual experience by using devices like rumble generators, ambient lights and fans that blowdry your hair while you play.



FAR CRY 2

FAR CRY 2, aside from the title, in no way affiliated with the first *Far Cry*. It's a strange situation, but folks expecting Trigen, Jack Carver and tropical island settings are in for a surprise. *Far Cry 2* shoves players into a country besieged by violence and (for the most part at least) gives them free reign over how different their experience will be from the next person's. It's a massive world with so much to do, so many things to see and copious amounts of people to shoot. You're free to go where you like, when you like and how you like. It's a bit like a *Grand Theft Auto* title set in Africa, but with less shooting of pimps, hookers and drug dealers, and with more realism.

FC2 starts off right before the war in the country that the game is set in escalates. An on-rails sequence shows you a country that has so much potential, but the people who inhabit it have squandered that potential. In essence, the game world mirrors many of the African countries that we see and hear about on the news, and although we may

feel pity for those living in said countries, we're largely indifferent towards their predicament. Before the game starts, you'll pick one character from a selection of mercenaries, and you'll take the reins as the puppet master behind the chosen character's actions. When the game starts, you're a mercenary in the purest sense: you're simply working for the highest bidder, with no sympathy towards the people who are hurt by your actions. You can choose to do tasks for a number of employers. There are the weapons dealers who will provide you with access to new weapons that you can purchase, should you complete their missions, and there are cellular towers dotted around the world map that you can visit to get missions from an anonymous source. Then there are the main story missions and the jobs for the underground: the former being missions for the two warring factions (the APR and the UFLL) that are the main contributors to the current state of the country and the latter being civilians who will give you malaria medicine



in exchange for your assistance in certain matters. On that note, it has to be mentioned that you start out the game infected with malaria. You'll need medication to keep tabs on the disease, because at times the symptoms will overwhelm you, messing with your Chi by inhibiting your vision as the nauseating effects take hold. Basically, the malaria totally throws you off your game.

It's a bit difficult to care about the game's story early on in the game. There aren't any consequences to your actions early on, so for the first few hours of playtime you'll wonder what the point of all your shooting, driving and wound healing has to do with the game's bigger picture. Thankfully, once you reach a certain point in the game, everything gets turned on its head, and from then on your actions play a much larger role in the future of the troubled province. In truth, however, *FC2* is less about the story and more about getting lost in the world that Ubisoft Montreal has created. The play area is divided into two massive locations: the Northern District (the game's

RRP→ R399 | Publisher→ Ubisoft | Distributor→ Megarom
Genre→ FPS | Age Rating→ 18+ | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

It's been a good year for great looking explosions in games and the explosions in *Far Cry 2* are no exception.

INTERESTING ARMAMENTS

While you can purchase all the usual weapons (such as AK-47s, Dragunov sniper rifles and silenced pistols) from the various weapons vendors scattered around the game world, there are some unusual and interesting weapons thrown into the mix. Grenade launchers can be used as close-range artillery, the flamethrower, which, when used correctly, can make for some interesting combat scenarios, and then there's the mortar... well, I'll just let you find out for yourself.

Machine gun emplacements are liberally placed throughout the game world, but you're not the only one who gets to use 'em. Don't be too surprised when one of your enemies mounts one and starts peppering you with bullets...

No matter what situation you may find yourself in, there's nothing a really big gun can't fix.



starting area) and the Southern District, which you'll gain access to at a later stage of the game. Normal currency is useless during the war that you're thrust into. Everything is bought using rough diamonds, which can be acquired in a number of ways. Besides the story missions, you can also obtain diamonds by doing certain side jobs or by going the obsessive compulsive route and searching for the numerous briefcases filled with diamonds that have been hidden throughout the world of *FC2*. (These briefcases don't yield much profit, but they are so liberally scattered throughout the world that you could easily find four or five of them while doing a side mission). Having diamonds at your disposal gives you the resources required to visit the weapons vendor to buy or upgrade weapons, purchase various enhancements for your safe houses and to purchase upgraded equipment that will enhance your survivability (such as the camouflage suit that'll make you all stealthy like).

The buddy system that had been so

proudly touted leading up to the game's release works very well. When the game starts out, you'll have a best buddy and a second-best buddy, and they help you out in different ways. Your best buddy will provide you with alternate paths through the story missions that will either make your job easier, or, as is more often the case, it'll make your mission longer and far more difficult to complete. However, finishing these missions by taking the path recommended by your buddy does reward you with some cool stuff for your safe houses, such as ammo piles and vehicles. Your second-best buddy will pull you out of situations in which you bite off far more than you can chew by showing up to rescue you when you go down and then helping you out until you've done what you needed to do. It's a nice system and you're likely to grow attached to these characters as you progress through the game, especially since your buddies can die and once they're dead, they're gone for good. There are often situations where one of your buddies will

Having to yank a bullet out of your arm

Better Than



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Being a mercenary

Worse Than



Bottom Line

A great open-world experience set in a backyard not too far from our own.

88
OUT OF 100

eat a few thousand bullets too many and fall to the ground waiting for help from you. In these situations, you have to make a choice between whether you'll lend a helping hand, abandon your buddy to his/her fate, or if you'll simply sacrifice one of your bullets to finish off the job.

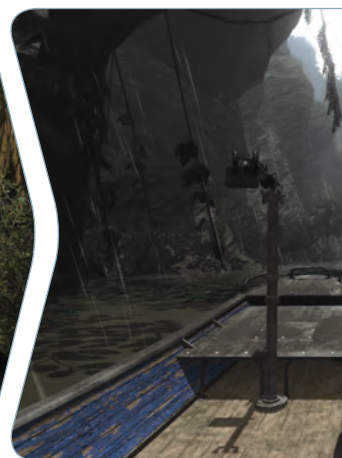
The game can get really chaotic at times with barrels exploding and the grasslands around you burning as you attempt to assault an enemy checkpoint. Couple this with the fact that your weapons can jam (and even explode in your hands after too much wear and tear) and you've got the recipe for a fantastic mix of mayhem and fun. Moreover, after you've taken enough damage, you'll have to perform field surgery on yourself. The field surgery makes for some particularly nail-biting situations, because

you'll have to try and find some quick cover so you can pull bullets out of your arm, force broken limbs back into place and remove bits of glass that are embedded in various appendages. All this has to be done on a time limit, since your character can bleed out if he's taken critical damage and you've wasted too much time trying to find cover. If you don't want to go through the mental trauma inflicted by having to reload from your last save, you can keep your health up by using syrettes that you've collected.

The game never takes you out of a first-person viewpoint and no matter what happens, you're seeing everything through your character's eyes. This works incredibly well, because it never removes you from the action. When you're doing field surgery, you'll see the gruesome animation first

hand as your character lifts his arm up to his mouth to remove a bullet. During the sequences where you have to choose whether your buddy lives or dies, you'll be holding him/her in your arms, seeing their pain right before your eyes as they beg you to help them. The first-person camera does an amazing job of making the player feel emotionally attached to the game and the characters within.

The technical side of the game is mostly flawless. While the graphics are not as impressive as those of *Crysis Warhead*, the game is definitely no slouch in the graphical department. The character models lack detail, but the world itself is exceptionally good looking. The African sunrise is a pleasure to behold, and the scenery seamlessly transitions from wide-open



VEHICULAR MAYHEM

There are a number of vehicles available to toy around with in the game, ranging from nimble dune buggies to trucks and jeeps with .50-calibre mounted guns on them.

Premature detonation of a grenade

Machete to the back of the head

Tripped on a landmine

Got too close to a man touting an RPG

Syphilis

Heart attack upon seeing the effects of the Syphilis



plains to savannah to mountainous jungles as you travel around the world. The audio is also phenomenally well done, especially in terms of ambient sounds. You can hear insects chirping in the undergrowth, hear herds of zebra in the distance and listen to the sounds of the foliage crunching beneath your feet. The voice acting is solid, if somewhat rigid, but on the whole, the game sounds and looks fantastic.

There isn't much that is wrong with *FC2*, but there are a few minor annoyances. The side missions can get a bit repetitive after a while (for example: the weapons-vendor missions almost always require that you ambush a convoy carrying a rival dealer's weapons) and a little more variation in these little side quests would have been nice. The console versions of the game have

fixed locations where players are allowed to save their game, but the PC version allows players to save their game at any time. This could mean that players of the PC version are likely to get more joy out of experimentation with the game mechanics than console players will, since PC players have less to lose.

In truth, I'm just nitpicking. These minor gripes are not enough to detract from the experience that *FC2* offers. The developers have done a phenomenal job of putting together a game that is highly polished and offers many things to do, with multiple ways to do them. I'll put it as bluntly as possible: *Far Cry 2* is a great game - one that you don't want to miss out on if you love the type of gameplay that it offers.

Dane Remendes

THE ONLY REASON YOU GOT THAT FRAG IS BECAUSE MY GUN JAMMED...

The multiplayer in *FC2* is actually entertaining and incorporates most of the gameplay elements from the single-player game, such as the field surgery, weapon jamming and the flames that slowly spread across the map to engulf your enemies. The game modes available include the standard Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and a variation on Capture The Flag called "Capture The Diamond." Another game mode - called "Uprising" - is the capture-and-hold-the-point-type of gameplay like that seen in the *Battlefield* series. The multiplayer is class based and the usual classes are available, such as the sneaky Saboteur and the close-combat orientated Guerrilla. The game also has a levelling system, so you'll gain diamonds as you play multiplayer that will allow you to purchase new weapons.



It's quite intense watching flames engulf the countryside when you get a bit trigger happy with a flamethrower. You can quite literally watch flames creep up trees and see them devour the grasslands as they are carried by the winds. If you can find creative ways to use a molotov cocktail, then flames could become your greatest ally.

THE MAP EDITOR

WHILE MANY GAMES, AND first-person shooters in particular, have been shipping with editing tools for some time, it's only in the last few years that the quality and ease-of-use of those tools have really come under scrutiny. Interest in creating user-generated content is steadily on the rise, with games shipping with not only increasingly powerful editing tools, but tools that are becoming ridiculously easy to use. The *Far Cry 2* Map Editor sits right at the top of the simplicity tower, unfortunately bringing with it a few drawbacks, mainly in the form of technical limitations and the lack of certain features

that have become standard over the years.

Technical limitations aside, this editor is by far the quickest and easiest tool of its kind I've had the pleasure to use. It feels more like the *C&C 3* editor than anything near the complexity (and power) of UnrealEd, but everything it sets out to do, it accomplishes admirably, allowing those with almost no technical knowledge the ability to put together a decent-looking map within a couple of hours, and giving those with the patience and expertise a streamlined process to get through all the boring bits quickly.

Geoff Burrows



BUILDING THE NAG MAP

Below you will find a rough outline of the design process behind the official *Far Cry 2* NAG map found on this month's cover DVD. It's not the ultimate guide to map editing, but will outline some of the important tasks in designing a map that's both fun and functional.



STEP 1: EXPERIMENT

It may seem obvious, but spending an hour or two just messing around with the tools is a great way to learn an editor as straightforward and logical as this. Get comfortable with the navigation, get to grips with the program's limitations and learn what objects are available.

Quick Tip: Starting your map off with the Wilderness Generator is a great way to get a feel for the different environments in all their glory.

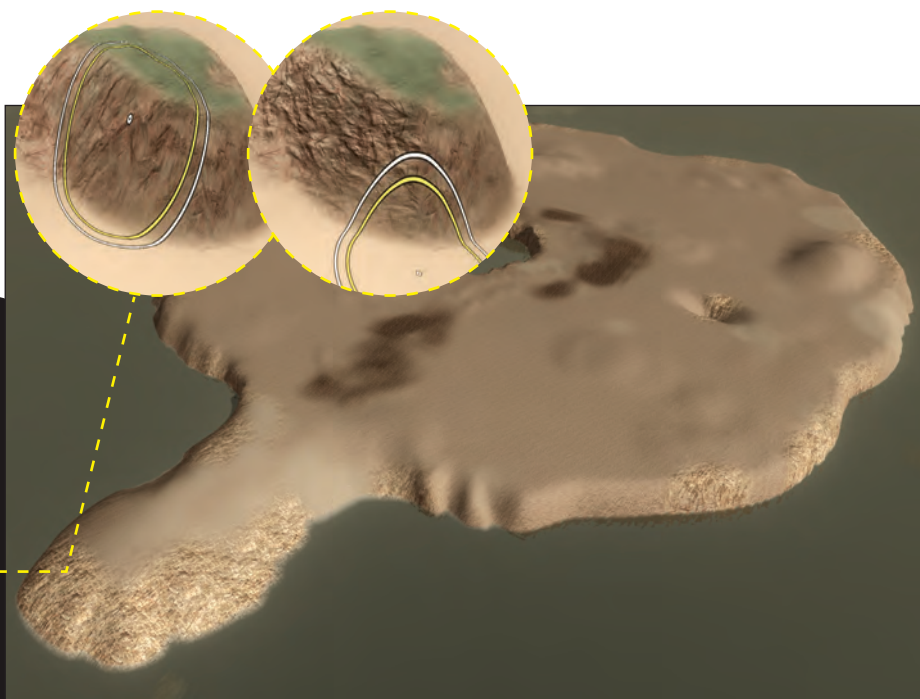
STEP 2: PLAN

While you don't have to plot out absolutely every part of your map, it's important to have an idea of what you want to accomplish before you dive in. Make sure you've identified key locations such as combat hot zones, weapon caches and sniper posts.

STEP 3: TERRAIN AND TEXTURES

Carving out the terrain first is a great way to help define the flow and size of your playing area. It's important to jump in (Ctrl+G) and walk around the area to get a feel for just how big it really is before you start populating it with objects.

Quick Tip: Hit the 'Make beautiful' button when you're done texturing: it'll reassign the mapping coordinates for any steep slopes to reduce texture stretching.



STEP 4: PLACE MAJOR OBJECTS

These are the big, important or level-defining objects like buildings, roads and bridges. Location is vital, so take your time and don't be afraid to go back and adjust terrain as you go. This is also a great time to start placing a few spawn points.

STEP 5: PLACE DETAIL OBJECTS

The smaller objects like cover, gun nests and bunkers help players create their own strategies for your maps, but make sure you don't force certain player behaviour; rather try to accommodate (either through removal or enhancement) for those little quirks you expect your players to discover. Be sure to add furniture and other aesthetic touches to help bring life to your own personal savannah.

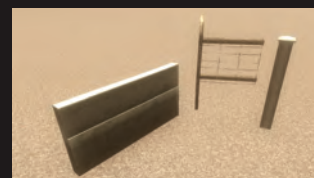
STEP 6: PLACE COLLECTIONS

Far Cry 2's collections are what really separate it from other editors. These assortments of grass, trees and rocks add realism to your level and keep things interesting.

Quick Tip: Remember, grass burns, making for an excellent way to flush out any lazy campers.

PRE-FABULOUS

While you can't import any custom objects or textures, a bit of creativity with the existing objects can help separate your maps from the rest. Using objects in ways perhaps not intended can take even the drabest objects and make them interesting. You can turn simple objects like these



into this ▼



Or grab a few steel girders and go wild.

STEP 7: FINAL TOUCHES

Go through each step again in finer detail, or just add more objects until you're happy your map looks the way you want. Be sure not to overdo it - too many objects will bog down gameplay and system resources alike. **NAG**

DEAD SPACE

THE DEAD SPACE DIARIES

Sometimes, NAG writers get chatty about certain games. Our version of the office water cooler is Google Chat. Tarryn (one of our freelancers) and Michael (the revered Editor of NAG) both started playing *Dead Space* at more or less the same time. It's an epic game that resulted in sporadic bursts of Google chatting – much was discussed about many things*. Instead of a usual review laundry list of how good and bad a game is, we've decided to copy and paste a long conversation we had about the best game we've seen in years.

It all began on the 24th of October 2008...

24 OCTOBER 2008

Michael: Dead Space... Wow!

Sixteen minutes pass

Tarryn: ;_ ; want

Michael: Oh yes, you do... it's like a slice of awesome in a pie of cool...

Tarryn: I saw it at BT earlier when I went to go get Fable. The temptation was exceedingly great. :{

Michael: "Imagine an enemy coming at you..."

something terrifying, something you can't understand. Then imagine firing a stasis weapon at it, it slows down (bullet time) while still coming at you. Then you start chopping it up while it's in stasis. Stasis ends... wet pile of alien goo on floor. You can then stomp on the remains!

Tarryn: But...

Michael: Bliss...

Tarryn: The universe would explode with awesome.

Michael: It already has.

Tarryn: Have you done any of the zero-g stuff yet?

Michael: Nope, just starting...

Tarryn: {

Michael: It's not just that - the environment and everything just feels spot on. Like Rapture - almost...

Tarryn: It's getting really big reviews online. Sort of came out of nowhere as a surprise GOTY contender. The atmosphere does look absolutely fantastic, though and dismemberment is just, like, auto win.

Michael: You can even adjust the cutting tool horizontal for legs and vertical for arms... }

Tarryn: Praise the lord.

Michael: I just stomped a body I don't trust dead bodies anymore - you'll see why), and its head rolled down the ramp and stopped at the bottom... This is really fun.

27 OCTOBER 2008

Tarryn: My sister ordered Dead Space for me as a present :o/

Michael: Best present you'll get in a while...

Tarryn: I can't wait to play it. :D

Michael: Well as of last night it actually managed to get better for me...

Tarryn: BUT HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?

Michael: It just is, leave it be... A trip outside the spaceship +3 - finding a secret stash of medical supplies where I thought it would be a good place to hide a secret +4 - being attacked by some worm of death that came from exactly the place I didn't expect it to +3 - Surviving an Brute attack and winning +6. This is how it's possible... }

Tarryn: ... can't wait OMG.

Michael: I'm only on mission 4 of 12!

This is Isaac's suit. The light blue strip is his health and the half-moon indicator is how much stasis energy is left. When the health drops too low, Isaac will limp along until it is replenished.



Tarryn: My sister says that one of the best

things about the game is how you -aren't- attacked. Like. Long spaces where you expect something to happen, but nothing does. Very few games manage to create that sort of suspense convincingly.

28 OCTOBER 2008

Tarryn: Dead Space just arrived. This game has a real Event Horizon thing going on.

Michael: Scariest movie I've seen in a while that one...

Tarryn: I love that film. It's quite scandalous how many people haven't seen it. It's a bona fide horror/sci-fi legend. Sam Neill's immortal line, 'you don't need eyes where you're going'

Michael: Indeed... I shat my jean pant
A little later...

Michael: Bastards...

Tarryn: Michael. Dead Space is like amazing. I can't concentrate on my work. All I want to do is dismember stuff.

Michael: :)... The bastard developers put bugs in a crate... they killed me. It's good hey! Really special game...

Tarryn: Very, very special. The sound design is just ... OMG. I've never heard such brilliant sound in a game.

Michael: I'm facing a 'meat' passage - I'm scared.

Tarryn: Every part of the game so far has been really special - the lighting, the sound and the set pieces. What a nice surprise dead space turned out to be.

Michael: Well - I just got grabbed by one of those snake things... F**cker!

Tarryn: I hate those little creepy crawly things, I

*It took a while to straighten it all out (spelling and grammar), clean up (swearing and poor-taste references to things polite people really shouldn't talk about openly) and polish (removing anything that might make us look dumb).



Yes! You get to go outside (and even die outside). When Isaac enters an area without an atmosphere, his oxygen starts running lower, adding to further panic and stress to an already stressful gaming experience.



Some parts of the map also feature no gravity, and Isaac will have to leap from platform to platform. The catch is that all the necromorphs aren't affected by gravity...

g. Multiple impacts detected across the starboard hull.



kept getting swarmed earlier. :<

Michael: Reminds me of that Halo race... the... can never remember.

Tarryn: The Flood

Michael: Ah - yes... The Flood... Those audio files are also fun...

Tarryn: Yes, I'm starting to see the 'Rapture in space' thing now. :P It's like Resident Evil 4 f**ked BioShock and had an ugly baby.

Michael: With a little Alien here and there - plus some Prey...

Tarryn: And lots of Event Horizon

Michael: It's like they took the best of everything and made the perfect space survival horror game...

Tarryn: It's pretty much exactly that, yes. It's how Doom III could have been. But wasn't.

Michael: Tip... don't fire those force balls in zero gravity - I just ate one.

Tarryn: Dude. I get in and out of zero-g as fast as possible. It gives me the creeps.

Michael: I know - you feel so vulnerable and outside is just wicked.

Tarryn: How awesome are the vacuum bits too? The sound is superb...

Michael: Yip... I'll be like relieved when this is over - it's making me so tense. Have you tackled a brute yet?

Tarryn: What do they look like? The gross, burnt-looking black guys?

Michael: Heavily armoured and go into a defensive posture when attacked... Large.

Tarryn: Um. No.

Michael: Good luck!

Tarryn: That doesn't sound too good either. I might have to buy a bigger weapon then.

Michael: Nope - just pray harder and run...

Screaming also helps

Tarryn: I've actually run away a few times already...

29 OCTOBER 2008

Michael: I'm on 8 hours for Dead Space... on Chapter 8

Tarryn: I'm in chapter 4 now. I restarted because I want the 'one gun' achievement and it's just not really practical on hard difficulty.

Michael: I'm out of everything - ammunition, money, everything after the boss battle... Now I'm really scared...

Tarryn: You probably should be.

Michael: How am I going to fight without bullets? :(

Tarryn: I've noticed the game tends to hand out stuff you need. I'm sure it's not just a coincidence. So you'll probably pick up ammo again soon.

Michael: Hoping... I blew a LOT on that boss...

Tarryn: I killed a brute, btw. What a f**ker - although stasis works well on them.

Michael: G*d - attacked by 5 things in a lift - no ammunition... was swiping up a storm... Those brutes are cool.

Tarryn: <-swearing-> They are. Just when you get comfortable sawing up the grunts, along comes the f**king sergeant. :P I got such a fright when I came out of the centrifuge and that tentacle monster got me.

Michael: ME too... That was classic... well I died.

Tarryn: Me too. ->-> I also died, like, four times in the centrifuge by getting mashed. So embarrassing.

Michael: Dead again... I'm having some trouble here. Send in the marines.

Tarryn: Have you pimped out your suit?

Michael: Not really - more the guns.

Tarryn: Well that's your problem.

Michael: I'm more the offensive type...

Tarryn: Yes. You're very offensive.

Michael: Well yes... double meaning implied. :)

Tarryn: I really should do some <-swearing-> work. Dead Space has killed my productivity.

Michael: You better... production is firing like mad at the magazine...

You can imagine



Better Than

PC

360

PS3

WII

Survival Horror, actions, terror, etc.

PS2



For Fans of

PSP

DS

MOB



Bottom Line

The survival-horror genre just took a giant leap forward with the best game we've seen this year.



Tarryn: I failed at shooting asteroids and destroyed the entire ship. :_;
Michael: Fool...
Tarryn: Yeah, how many attempts did it take you, hot shot?
Michael: 1. I took my inspiration from Star Wars... I was down to 3 'shields' however...
Tarryn: Funny, I thought of exactly the same thing. :P
Michael: Very close
Tarryn: In fact, I'm sure Rebel Assault had a sequence just like it.
Michael: Yeah - dead again... Things are getting tougher.
Tarryn: Should've spent more cash on your suit, silly. The suit upgrades make a huge difference.
Michael: Ah well...

30 OCTOBER 2008

Tarryn: If you're stuck on the leviathan in Dead Space, my sister recommends using kinesis to lob its explosive pods back at it. If that makes any sense (not gotten that far myself).
Fifty-two minutes pass
Michael: He went down like a little girl...
Twenty-six minutes pass
Michael: Putting bugs in boxes is just not cricket...
Tarryn: I assume this is something that happens in Dead Space?
Michael: Yeah...
Tarryn: That game has really bitten you, huh?
Michael: I must say... like not before in a while...
Twelve minutes pass
Michael: Hmm... Level 4 suit...
Tarryn: :O I want a level 4 suit
Michael: I should have saved my money 35K. I have 10K and no ammo
Tarryn: Improvise. :P
Michael: Right
Tarryn: I still haven't managed to kill anything with its own severed limbs. That will be my goal for tonight, I think.
Fifty-three minutes pass
Tarryn: Killed a necromorph with its own severed arm - in zero-g. I ←swearing→ own.
Michael: :)
Tarryn: \o/

31 OCTOBER 2008

Tarryn: That part in dead space with the tethered asteroid scares the sh*t out of me.
Michael: YES!
Tarryn: :_;
Michael: Took me ages to figure it out... The not getting hit part - like, oh - there's an outside.
Tarryn: OMG, it's NOT NICE outside, deep space ... necromorphs ... ugh, but even that huge hangar the asteroid is actually in scares me.

2 NOVEMBER 2008

Tarryn: Finished Dead Space yet?
Michael: Tonight I think...
Tarryn: The ending's great...
Michael: Looking forward to it and not - how about a second opinion for Dead Space? 200-300
Tarryn: definitely!
Michael: Do it... after Fable 2. :)
Tarryn: Also, there's replay incentive - you get stuff after finishing the game :)
Michael: Spoil and die!
Tarryn: Ha ha ha ha go play it.
Michael: I'm cooking the NAG DVD this afternoon -after that adverts then Dead Space.
Tarryn: your priorities are all f**ked up.
Michael: Right
Michael: How many hours did it take you BTW?
Tarryn: Dead Space? Just over 12 hours.
Thirty-nine minutes later

Michael: That artefact was bigger than I thought.
Tarryn: Oh, you're there already? Did you find the Peng treasure? :P
Michael: Yes... no. Is it in the cargo hold?
Tarryn: No, it's in the ←spoiler deleted→.
Michael: I'll get there...
Fourteen minutes pass
Michael: Got the Peng - not strange at all...
Tarryn: It's worth a lot of cash
Michael: I see - WTF is a Peng
Tarryn: I think it's a soft drink or something - there's an advert on a wall early in the game somewhere.
Michael: Got a nice gang rape in that receiving room... :)
Tarryn: There are a few of those. :P Remember the one just before you released the asteroid? That was BAD.
Michael: I'm still sh*tting marshmallows

4 NOVEMBER 2008

Michael: I see Isaac is a pretty boy... then I sh@t!
Tarryn: Ha ha ha me too!
Michael: Bastards
Tarryn: Classy
Michael: Nice... Kept the faith all the way through - the game didn't lose its way
Tarryn: It's the perfect game. There's nothing I didn't like about it. That NEVER happens.
Michael: I think you might just be right... Me too... You can even slow down or speed up the credits.
Tarryn: Even the zero-g bit - they totally f**king freaked me out, but the feature is brilliant - want more.
Michael: Now I worry if the sequel will EVER be able to stand up to this.
Tarryn: I know. It's worrying. How do you top the

perfect game?
Michael: Nice list of goodies - military suit is catching my eye
Tarryn: It's VERY expensive :P 99,999, I think.
Michael: Do I just start a new game now and plough through
Tarryn: Yeah, it'll ask if you want to save say yes, then load that game I'll restart you with all your stuffs.
Five minutes pass
Michael: Hey! I started a new game and no stuffs?
Tarryn: Don't start a new game, silly. Load the one you saved :P
Michael: Ah
Michael: Isaac actually exposing his face (although I see he does right in the beginning anyway) is the only 'original' thing that games does...
Tarryn: Yup :D and yet despite being so f**king derivative the game totally rocks. It's like it took all the best parts of other games, and glued them together into one MONSTER AWESOME GAME.
Michael: I know - I respect it so much for taking everything that's come in the past and presenting it in such a compelling way. It's the antithesis of the phrase new IP which the hype machine was tossing around - bloody genius
Tarryn: Put that in your review.
Michael: I will...
Later after mailing Tarryn the MP3 of the Dead Space lullaby
Tarryn: Is that the version from Dead Space? You're such a fanboy.
Twelve minutes pass
Michael: Hey - this is my first fanboy affair...
Tarryn: You could do so much worse, I suppose. **NAG**

Michael James & Tarryn van der Byl





THEY WIPED AWAY ALL THE SPIRIT
AND GRITTIENESS THIS CITY EVER HAD.
I'M GOING TO SHOW THEM
THAT THEY MISSED A SPOT.

THERE'S NO LOOKING BACK

Top CD Menlyn: Shop LF57 & 58, Parking level 5A, Menlynpark Shopping Centre, cnr of Atterbury & Lois Ave, Pretoria. (012) 361 6247.
Top CD Kolonnade: Shop L70A, Lower level , Kolonnade Shopping Centre, Zambezi Drive, Montana, Pretoria. (012) 548 5515.
Top CD Centurion: Shop 270 Entrance 5, Centurion Shopping Centre, Heuwel Avenue, Centurion. (012) 663 7468.
Top CD Cresta: Shop U44, Game entrance, Cresta Shopping Centre, Beyers Naude Drive, Randburg. (011) 476 7414.
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Top CD Wonderboom: Shop G46, Wonderboom Junction, Lavender street.



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三



PLAYSTATION 3



FABLE II

FIVE HUNDRED SUMMERS HAVE swept by since a nameless Hero rose up and bested Jack of Blades in the Hall of Heroes, avenging the long and cruel imprisonment of his mother at the villain's hands and ridding the world of Albion of a great and terrible evil. Depending on who tells the tales around your campfire, the Hero may then have gone on to defeat Jack of Blades - somewhat improbably resurrected as a dragon - a second time at Archon's Folly in the Northern Wastes. Err, once again ridding the world of Albion of a great and terrible evil. Anyway, all that stuff happened a long time ago, and the world has moved on. Now they have guns.

You are ←your name here→, a lovable urchin scratching out a wretched existence on the streets of Bowerstone Old Town with your big sister, Rose. When the pair of you get your scruffy mittens on a magical

music box, your only wish is to live a life of idle luxury in the nearby Castle Fairfax, currently inhabited by the recently bereaved and now full-time reclusive weirdo, Lord Lucien. Later that same night, Lucien's guards arrive outside your little hovel, and escort you and your sister to the Castle. But just when it seems your luck is teetering upon the threshold of some serendipitous new turn, the Lord commits an act of selfish and unspeakable wickedness, and your destiny - pledged to dread purpose - is laid before you in the softly falling snow.

After all the controversy, deflated hype, and outrageous disappointment that was *Fable*, could Peter Molyneux finally deliver the game he'd talked about to anybody who would listen for nearly three years?

The short version: mostly.

The slightly longer

NAG
MUST PLAY



HOW MUCH ARE LITTLE CONSTABLES PAID?

When bandits and beasts fall over and die in Albion, they are reduced, by means both mysterious and certainly sorcerous, to a little heap of little 'glowy' balls that your body is conveniently able to osmose, by means both mysterious and certainly sorcerous, and converted into useful XP. Well, useful for your butch and heroic enterprises, perhaps, but little 'glowy' balls aren't exactly going to pay your way through vocational college. And lay-buying that shiny new sword would be so gauche. Therefore, when you're not out chopping off heads, hacking off limbs, and cleaving other stuff in twain, you'd do well to procure some gainful employment that pays in actual cash.

Luckily for you, there are all sorts of things that need doing around Albion... well, if "all sorts of things" is understood to mean blacksmithing, woodcutting, and bartending, anyway. The first of these employment opportunities will be present as soon as you first arrive in Bowerstone (and pretty much throughout the rest of the game, actually), with the other two becoming available once you've slogged around the countryside a little more. Putting enough time and effort into each job, you'll earn yourself promotions and additional star ratings in the profession, netting you more cash for your labours even if you'll never really recover all the indignity of pushing pints for barflies until 4am when your day job is saving the world.

While you're probably all raring to run off helter-skelter into the trees and bring seven shades of

adolescent fury down upon the heads of the forest denizens (look out, rabbits!), it's worth investing twenty minutes or so of blacksmithing at the start of the game. A few thousand gold pieces – easily and quickly amassed forging swords – is enough to buy a couple of the stalls on the market bridge, securing a steady income for when you're out of town doing the hero stuff.

Much later in the game, depending on your own actions around the world, you may occasionally discover further lucrative employment opportunities as a bounty hunter or even an assassin. These assignments dole out renown and alignment points as well as hard currency, so if you're saving up for the Celebrity and Extremist achievements, here's your chance.



ORB-TACULAR!

Okay, so the promised co-op play went belly up. It's there, but it's a total non-event of Molyneuxian proportions. Instead of shipping your own intrepid, sharp-dressed man (or woman) and inventory over to your friend's Albion, you're stuck with a drab, predefined henchman (or henchwoman) with no stuff. Boo, hiss, etc. The Orb system, however, goes a long, long way to mitigating this sorry state of affairs. If you've got yourself one of those shiny Xbox LIVE Gold subscriptions, you'll appear in other people's games as a sort of floating orb thing, and other people will appear in yours (you can toggle this between people on your LIVE Friend List and the general public). You can use orbs to swap items with another player or spy on their game stats, but most amusing (and startling, in my experience) of all, you can talk with them. So, you might stumble across your pals in Rookridge at 2am, and have yourself a big old chat about Wraithmarsh real estate and the falling price of celery. Or something. The point is, it's an ingenious and innovative feature that slops a whole new coat of social paint onto an otherwise single-player game, and one that I do hope starts turning up all over the place now.

Good, evil, and everything in between

For Fans of



The inevitable Fable II: The Lost Chapters

Worse Than



Bottom Line

The dog is totally adorable.

86
OUT OF 100

HOW IS BABBY FORMED

The complicated business of tangling sheets is even more complicated in *Fable II*, not least of all because – just like in real life – nobody really wants to tell you how it's done, opting instead for all manner of vague prevarication, mostly of the "no LOL" variety. Good thing we're such a shameless rabble of morally insolvent corruptors of virtue at NAG. Bust these moves in the wild monkey dance:

- Make sure the object of your salacious attentions is actually... you know, interested. This is indicated (with regular folk, anyway

- prostitutes aren't picky) by the readily identifiable heart hovering over their head. If it's not there, it's not happening.

- The second prerequisite is where most people seem to trip up. In addition to a heart all a-flutter, the potential bunk candidate must be attracted to you. To check this, focus the person with the left trigger, and press Y to see their stats. Firstly, make sure their sexual orientation, listed just under their name, is in line with the proposal. You might think Jenny the Housewife is the ideal candidate for a bit of X-rated indulgence, but if she's a lesbian, no amount of cheap toy horses and "Kiss My Ass"

expressions is going to persuade her to do that thing you saw in *Twinblade's Dungeon of Fun 4*. Secondly, the actual physical attraction meter is displayed at the bottom of the stat window – you'll want that maxed out or as close as possible. Wear something nice.

- Finally, once you have all that going on (you animal, you), use the "Follow" or "Come Back to My Place" expression (available from the Bowerstone bookstore) to move your hot date from the furniture shop to somewhere a little more horizontal. Once there, focus your partner and then the bed with the left trigger, and push A to get sexy.



version, in short sentences: The dog is totally adorable. The world of Albion is absolutely breathtaking. The dialogue and written content are intelligent and genuinely funny. There's a lot of stuff to see and do. The Will system, entirely revamped since the first game and significantly different from casting systems in almost every other RPG ever, is quite marvellous. There's none of that tedious XP grinding that most RPGs use to make up for a total lack of ingenuity. The dog is totally adorable. The single-button combat isn't anywhere near as awful as anyone might have expected. The game oozes charm, wit, and personality out of every orifice. Stephen Fry as Reaver might be the greatest accomplishment in voice acting in the history of videogames. In fact, all of the voice acting is really, really top-notch, begging the question, "Why does

no other game get this right, like, ever?" The dog is totally adorable. The co-op play is rubbish. The menu feels like it's on 56K dialup in another solar system. The inventory system is somewhat cumbersome and takes more navigation than it should. The context-sensitive D-pad shortcuts aren't always quite what you might reasonably expect*. The range of available clothing, hairstyles, and other custom appearances is far too limited. At the time of writing this, the game is exceedingly buggy. The inexplicably obtuse attraction system sees you trotting through towns, trailing a groaning entourage of love-struck peons begging for a wedding ring, despite you never having so much as introduced yourself to anyone... much less offered them a cup of hot coffee. But seriously, that dog is totally adorable. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

SECOND OPINION

While my opinion of *Fable* was that of a 'very hit-or-miss game that aimed high but hit low due to the sheer scope and scale attempted', it's pleasant to say that *Fable II* does a much better job of it and hits much closer to the mark Lionhead was aiming for. Not a bulls-eye, but not a miss either.

They removed a lot of cruft from the morality system and fixed the combat by keeping it simple yet entertaining, although the Fisher-Price skill system may irk those looking for a slightly deeper experience. You can max out your character in every conceivable way almost midway through the eight-hour-or-so main story arc, which coupled with the rather easy nature of the game, does dampen the element of challenge. Death is practically non-existent and even when it does happen, it's only a temporary black screen before you respawn right where you died, carrying a few extra scars.

That aside, props to Lionhead for crafting a vibrant and detailed environment without falling back on the stereotypical developer crutch of lifting most of your world from *Dungeons & Dragons*. It wouldn't have hurt to have a touch more variety in the creature department, though, and it's hard to give a damn about anyone in the world. Sure, you can marry them and have babies, but the characters that inhabit Albion are so one-dimensional, they may as well be invisible.

The exception is the dog, who is pretty much the 'Greatest Innovation In Gaming'. He's a good boy and your stalwart compatriot through thick and thin, which really made me wish they'd spent more time on the dog and less on the social facade the game insists on bothering you with.

Miktar Dracon



GEARS OF WAR 2



HOPE RUNS DEEP 07.11.08

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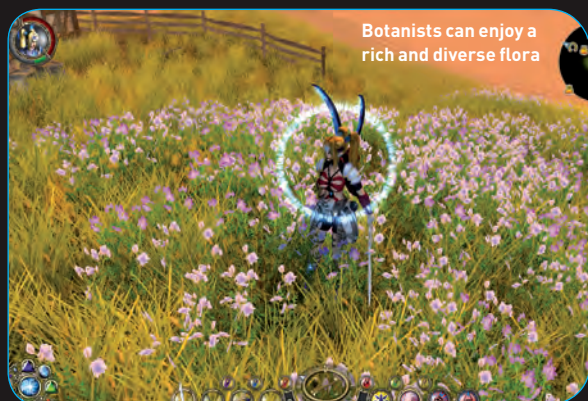
Microsoft
game Studios

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Jump in.

XBOX 360



Botanists can enjoy a rich and diverse flora



Mobile homes for the young and restless



Our very own crop circles!



You may meet a kindred spirit on your travels



'THIS WORLD IS SACRED'

While some festivals like to boast about 'international acts', Ancaria goes one further: it enjoys the music of a band from a world called Earth. Blind Guardian is a so-called 'metal band' from a land called Germany. They are, apparently, quite influential in their style and their region. This style is deep and evocative, with at times a hard edge, and at others either a melancholy or an uplifting character – and always dramatic. Travellers in Ancaria can enjoy a mini-concert; though will likely need to help the band to find its stolen instruments before it can perform.

SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

THOSE OF YOU LOOKING for a magical holiday destination this festive season need look no further. Ancaria is an enchanted land, with a rich culture and history, and a wealth of natural resources – not to mention some of the most spectacular locations to be found anywhere! This is an ideal destination for anyone seeking time away from their worldly concerns, and particularly for the backpacker who wants to explore a vibrant world at their own leisure.

THE SCENERY

Being a complete world, we can offer you just about any sort of locale that you may desire. Tropical beaches? But of course! Bustling city life with a lively market? No problem! A pastoral setting? We have many! Or do you seek something more specific, more niche, more specialist? How about spelunking? We have extensive cave networks, as well as other sorts of fascinating and mysterious underground spaces. How about a bit of mountaineering? Or do you perhaps enjoy exploring ghost towns? Arctic settings? Deserts? Swamps? We have them all! And in such abundance that it will take a long, long time for you to

explore it all! Each of these locations has its own fauna and flora. Enjoy the feel of soft, tall grass as it brushes up against your legs while you walk, take a break from boar hunting under a tree's shady leaves – by the side of a babbling brook, if you like! Prepare to have your breath taken away by our beautiful sunsets, which bathe some areas in reddish light, particularly when enjoyed from a height such as a mountain peak or a tall tower, with a refreshing Health Potion (endorsed even by Seraphim while smiting evil!). Of course, lush vegetation means that there are some bugs, as well as the occasional giant spider or scarab. Occasionally you may find that a portion of your map has erased itself (possibly a side effect of T-energy?), or that a fallen creature defies gravity and hangs in mid-air (also a T-energy manifestation?). It is unlikely, however, that any of these insidious insects would ruin your stay here.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

As one would expect from such a variety of climes, we are blessed with wonderfully diverse cultures. Yes, you have probably heard of the interracial tensions between elves and humans, but

NAG
MUST PLAY



these tales are wildly exaggerated. As for stories of religious bigotry, well, those are just that: stories! Fear not, we have a rainbow nation here, of sorts, living together in a fair semblance of harmony... As a result, there is considerable cultural tolerance, so don't be surprised to see people in a tavern or marketplace not so much as bat an eyelid at some outlandish sight that may leave you gaping in utter amazement. It's not inconceivable that you might even behold, with your own eyes, a member of the Seraphim, one of those angelic representatives of the Maker himself, going about her divine missions. Or you could run into a High Elf (one of those highly trained elven sorceresses), a bow- or blowgun-wielding Dryad, a returned-from-beyond-the-grave Shadow Warrior, a soul-machine synthesis known as a Temple Guardian, or a mysterious Inquisitor (nemesis to the Seraphim).

WORK OPTIONS

Those looking to experience Ancarian life in a more intimate manner may opt for the extended working vacation – no 'green card' or work visa required! Potential employers abound, offering jobs ranging



T-ENERGY

What is T-energy? Well, there are two subtle power sources that fuel the fauna, the flora, the magic and even the cosmological cogs and wheels of Ancaria. 'Essence' is of divine origin, and generally held to be responsible for breathing life into all beings and creatures. Much traditional magic, in the form of spells, is powered by Essence. 'T-energy' is a wilder force, only recently tamed, which is now being harnessed for a new sort of magic that is often called 'technology', as well as being integrated into traditional magic. Despite some recent unfortunate accidents and the resultant, very regrettable mutations, T-energy is considered the way of the future, with limitless potential...

from simple deliveries or collections, to complex, challenging or even dangerous work – the last of which earns appropriate danger pay. In this manner, not only can visitors earn a lucrative living to enjoy their stay here, but also gain invaluable experience! The particularly interested or ambitious can even involve themselves in the local political arena, perhaps even influencing momentous Ancarian events! In fact, it's not inconceivable that visitors could wind up as the stuff of legends.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

As you travel across Ancaria, you will have the opportunity to learn up to ten skills, which are chosen from a pool that is common to all classes, social or economic. Your background, however, will determine what sorts of combat arts are available to you, which are 15 special abilities that you can upgrade by studying runes that you may find or buy. What this means is that there are virtually limitless opportunities for self-improvement!

DISCLAIMER

As is the case in every exotic location, there are some minor hazards to be

found in Ancaria, some unique to it, and others common to any place where many sentient beings live. While natural disasters are fairly rare, with the weather generally being very clement and mild, and even the rain making for a pleasant diversion, some of the local fauna is 'shy', sometimes to the point of aggression or even danger. Of course, encounters with such beasts are quite uncommon, and tourists should have nothing to fear so long as they limit their travels to safety-approved areas. As in any society, there is also something of a criminal element to watch out for, though Ancaria prides itself on an uncommonly low crime rate. Nevertheless, the visitor to our fair world is advised to carry some basic weapon for self-defence, just in case, and to keep life insurance up to date – again, just in case. Regrettably, we are unable to offer any form of traveller's insurance to visitors. However, we do provide a network of resurrection monoliths, which will allow you, in the unlikely and most unfortunate of your untimely demise, to be reincarnated somewhere that you (hopefully) recently visited... **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Titan Quest



Diablo (yes, believe it!)



Better Than	PC
	360
As Good As	PS3
	WII
	PS2
	PSP
	DS
	MOB



Bottom Line

One of the best and most addictive games I have played in a long time (and shall be playing for a long time to come!).





RRP → R679 | Publisher → Activision/Blizzard | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Shooter | Age Rating → 16+

Look & Listen
For the Fans

NAG

FRACTURE

ORIGINAL IDEAS ARE GETTING fewer and fewer, even though new technology is allowing game developers to try new things. That's exactly what Day 1 Studios did with *Fracture*. They came up with a nifty idea and tried something new. The real pity is that they never capitalised on the idea fully, and let everything else slide in the process.

The idea behind *Fracture* is a good one. Vast climactic changes have left the United States split into two 'continents', with the entire Midwest having been flooded. In the West, the use of genetic modification is widespread. The US government doesn't like that much, though, and when they outlaw the practice, the West secedes from the Union, forming the Republic of Pacifica. The East, now called the Atlantic Alliance and dependent on cybernetic modification, decides to eliminate the threat posed by the Pacificans, by sending in the ridiculously named Jet Brody. That's where the player comes in.

Playing as Brody, the player takes to what are initially lush and interesting environments in an attempt to put the rebellion down and capture its rogue, megalomaniac leader. The environments get pretty old rather quickly though. But

then again, the player has the ability to alter the terrain. This is the good idea that the entire game is based on.

There are four ways to alter the terrain. The first (and easiest way) to do so is to use a device called the Entrencher – this handy tool allows the player to raise or lower the terrain at the push of a button. It has limitless ammunition, needing only to recharge for a few moments after extensive use. The Entrencher allows the player to create hills and holes to their heart's content. The other three ways are grenades, which come in limited supply. One grenade creates hills, the other holes and the third massive spikes that shoot up from the ground. The fourth creates a mini-black hole, and is arguably the coolest thing about *Fracture*. Seeing all the enemies around it being sucked into a central point before exploding is fun.

But back to terrain deformation. This ability is the central theme of the game and, initially, is quite nifty. The player can use the Entrencher to reach high areas, or can dig holes to clear tunnels. Additionally, hills can be raised to act as cover, or holes can be made to roll giant exploding balls that litter the landscape for no apparent reason

towards unsuspecting enemies. Various grenade tricks and Entrencher uses can also help solve puzzles, although these can hardly be called puzzles. The game drops some very heavy hints at what should be done to solve these little issues, making them about as challenging as poking a dead frog with a stick.

Eventually, the terrain thing becomes more of a hassle than it is ultimately worth. Building up cover would be great if the enemy didn't have their own Entrenchers to bring it down with again – it's simpler to run for a nook and hide while healing. With the exception of the vortex grenade, the explosives lack the kind of oomph that would have made them great. And, overall, the utilisation of the terrain-altering aspects of the game could have been used in many better ways... The player will find himself or herself mostly digging holes or raising hills to circumvent what eventually become annoying obstacles.

Other than that, *Fracture* is the kind of game that puts the "bog" into bog standard. We've seen hundreds of titles like this before – third-person shooters set in a devastated world. The game



throws truck-loads of unimaginative enemies at the player, wave upon wave of genetically modified soldiers that all look more or less the same and who, obviously, lost their intelligence during the modification process. The AI is dumb. Enemies will lose you behind a hill that you have just raised, and will stand dead still while you riddle them with bullets. What the AI lacks in smarts it makes up in numbers, though, resulting in a game that is ridiculously difficult at times, and thoroughly frustrating, despite numerous save spots. Even the boss battles lack the 'pop' of other games. All the player needs to do is perform rudimentary actions: avoid the attack, hit the weak spot, avoid the attack, and hit the weak spot. Certain levels gain the same kind of repetitive nature as well: enter the room, shoot the bad guys, and alter the terrain - rinse and repeat.

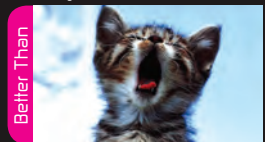
Funky weapons could have made a bit of a difference, but aside from one or two exceptions, *Fracture* doesn't offer anything special in that regard. A grenade launcher with button-activated grenades is fun the first few times you use it, but the machine gun, rocket launcher and sniper rifle are all

not just 'normal', they're rubbish to use.

Fracture is a perfect example of a wasted opportunity. It is not a bad game, but it certainly doesn't live up to the potential of the core concept. A technology such as terrain deformation is difficult to pull off in development terms, so one would think that the developers would have poured their all into this one, instead of developing a mediocre game that effectively shows off a new idea in an entertaining manner for around the first three quarters of an hour. Instead, everything about the game screams mediocrity: from the linear, repetitive levels through to the weapons and hordes of super-thick enemies. This is a title that screams "wasted opportunity" and, while it is not a complete pain to play, it lacks any real reason to be considered a 'must-have' game - very sad, but true. If there are no other games on offer, one could do worse than playing *Fracture*. However, with things as they are at the moment, you can't help but think that this title should have been released in the middle of the year. The competition right now is too stiff for *Fracture* to be a contender. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Being bored



Digging holes

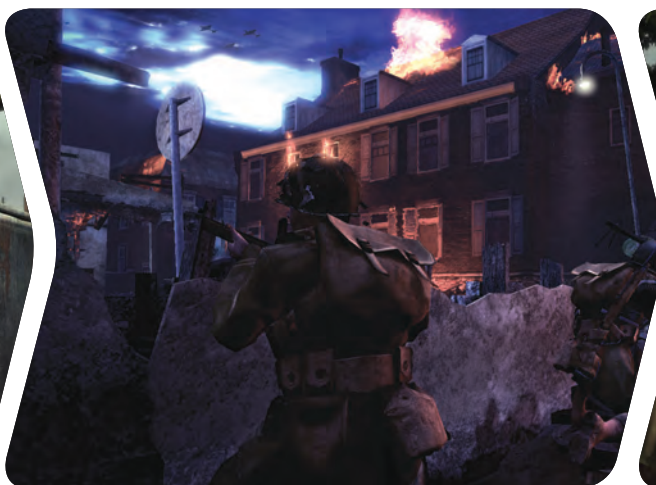
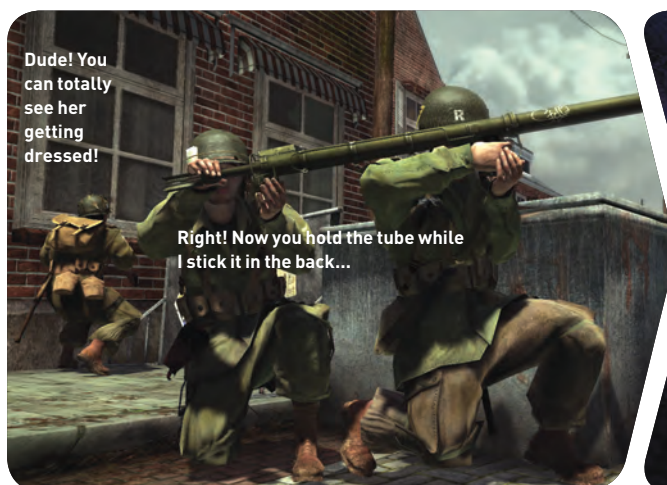


Bottom Line

It could have been amazing, but wasted opportunities and uninspiring dynamics make *Fracture* solidly average.

60
OUT OF 100

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

WORLD WAR II SHOOTERS are getting decidedly long in the tooth these days, but that doesn't seem to prevent the videogame industry from churning them out over and over again. We have done D-Day, survived the Russian Front and stormed Berlin repeatedly. That said, as long as the game is a compelling one, it doesn't really matter where it is set. As long as a game is good - gripping even - it can be situated absolutely anywhere, at any time. A good story helps, too. And Gearbox Interactive has generally struck both nails right on the head each time they released a new *Brothers in Arms* title.

The "War is Hell" theme that was established in the first game continues in *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*. In truth, the whole story continues (the game even starts with a trite and rather silly "Previously in Brothers in Arms" scene, which nonetheless adds to the episodic fundamentals of the game's story). The player fills the shoes of different characters through the series, true, but the core group of characters, the overriding themes and the emotionally charged mood of the game stays more or

less constant throughout the series.

As the series' first outing on the current-generation consoles, *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* does a good job. The developers took the challenges of creating a game for a far more powerful machine and worked through them effectively, creating a game that is appealing on many levels.

In the guise of Sgt. Baker, the player enters the tense battlefields of the Netherlands in this game. It's a part of the war generally not touched upon in too much detail. The bridge at Arnhem is a mission we've seen before, but the conflict in the Netherlands is so often glossed over in favour of Normandy and Berlin. This kind of depth and detail given to historical events are afforded the series by its episodic nature, and implies that there are a few more titles to come in this series.

As always in these games, the player is a squad leader in command of one or two groups of soldiers. The overall tactic is one of 'suppress and flank' (a common military practice even today), and through using the groups under the player's control, this is a highly achievable method of taking down the enemy - achievable, but not simple. A

'suppress and flank' ideal is dependent on available cover, of course, and the lay of the land. Some of the missions in this game get pretty tough when following the drill, and require a bit more thought. Still, the dynamic can get a little old.

Thankfully, the developers saw fit to build 'solo' missions into the game. Clearing buildings will often see the player's character going it alone, or supported by just one other soldier.

The AI units that fight alongside the player are smart enough to figure out what is required of them. They are controlled using a single, context-sensitive input, which is fairly simple to make use of, but can be a little slower than desired in the heat of battle. However, they will find the nearest cover and will fire at enemies automatically, unless given specific orders. They will also, on the other hand, run right through enemy fire and get themselves killed if the player gets a little too confident in issuing orders. Keeping moves short and uncomplicated is fine, but as soon as the path the AI needs to follow gets to be a bit too long, they will find the shortest route to their objective,



PC SECOND OPINION

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway is more of the same squad-based action we've seen before throughout the entire *BIA* series. The PC version is almost identical to the Xbox 360 version, albeit with a major graphical improvement. Being a first-person shooter, the game also benefits from the mouse-and-keyboard control scheme of the PC. The latest game in the series is a very cinematic affair, filled with slow-motion action sequences, flashy cut-scenes and in-game characters all red eyed and teary. Special mention must be made of the story, since *Hell's Highway* features one of the most well-written (although it could get a bit confusing if you've never played *BIA: Road to Hill 30*) stories ever told in a World War II shooter. The only thing that really matters at the end of the day is whether or not the game is fun, and I can safely say that it is. There are times when it can get a bit repetitive, since there's only so much suppressing, flanking, 'pip shooting' and repeating (in that order) one can do before it gets a bit tired, but the game manages to throw in enough fancy new situations to keep you interested long enough to play it through.

BIA: HH is a bit on the short side, but the ride is well worth it.

Dane Remendes

85
OUT OF 100

which is often right through the lion's den. While it is simple enough for the player to circumvent this, it would have been nice if the AI's self preservation had been turned up a notch or two. Squad members getting themselves killed can have a profound effect on the game, particularly in the case of specialised soldiers.

Leaving the AI squads behind and going solo through the complex environments is not the best of ideas. The game is meant to be played fairly slowly, with a lot of thought and a strong tactical approach. Going in guns blazing is a recipe for disaster in *Hell's Highway*. Even the missions where the player is placed in a 'going solo' situation need to be approached with solid tactics in mind.

Controlling Baker is simple enough: the control scheme is well thought out and responsive, despite the slightly tedious squad-command aspect. The game works very well on the Xbox 360, with just the right amount of input to deliver a realistic experience.

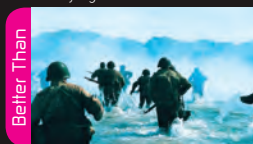
However, the real beauty of *Hell's Highway* lies in the presentation. The graphics are good, and the voice acting

superb. The game manages, through these and through a compelling, well-told story, to draw the player in and establish an emotional link between the in-game characters and the person playing the game. This drives the central theme of the game home even further: when main characters die, the player cannot help but feel a little pang of regret, at the very least. I doubt that anyone will be reduced to tears, but it's a pretty good level of emotional investment that the game establishes.

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway is not the perfect game, but fans of the series will likely not be disappointed when playing it. It will also not be everyone's cup of tea: the careful, tactical approach it demands makes every felled enemy a small victory and fans of gun-blazing action will probably find the slower pace of this game frustrating. But it's a solid offering, and one that is well worth playing. This series has always been a little more niche than other World War II shooters, but it fills that niche very nicely, continuing a well-established tradition that defines it as something a little different from the run-of-the-mill FPS title. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

D-Day again



The Pacific



Bottom Line

A fun World War II shooter that will appeal to fans.

80
OUT OF 100

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



SAINTS ROW 2

THE ORIGINAL SAINTS ROW was widely hailed as an enjoyable and well-polished clone of Rockstar's infamous *Grand Theft Auto* series; a game that had its own personality, but that was seen by many as an interesting diversion while they awaited a next-generation *GTA* release. With the release of *Saints Row 2*, any attempt to avoid comparisons with the *Grand Theft Auto* series is once again futile. However, developer Volition has just about pulled out all the stops in creating a game with many of its own charms and merits - a title that is an alternative to, rather than a mere rip-off of, the latest *GTA* release.

The game is once again set in the fictional city of Stilwater, a sprawling urban setting comprising more than 40 individual neighbourhoods, each controlled by one of the three gangs operating in the city. The game opens with your character awakening in the prison hospital after being in a coma for quite some time, following the brutal events at the end of the first game. You're immediately given access to *SR2*'s extremely robust character editor, which allows you to completely customise every aspect of your protagonist, from the gender, build and features, right down to minute aspects of his or her attire. After deftly escaping the guarded facility, your character then sets about the task of reclaiming control of the whole of Stilwater from the rival gangs who are trying to overrun it.

The game takes place in the same sort of

open environment as fans of *GTA* are used to, with much of the action typically involving performing various nefarious deeds, either on foot or within a (probably stolen) vehicle. The entertaining, though ultimately fairly nondescript story is advanced by completing various missions, the objectives of which typically involve gunning down enemies or raiding an opposing organisation's headquarters; though there are a few slightly more imaginative challenges thrown in every now and then to keep things interesting.

Where *Saints Row 2* comes into its own, however, is with the additional quests and activities available to you throughout Stilwater. These additional activities are useful in earning your character greater 'respect', which in turn makes more standard missions available for play, but they're also incredibly entertaining in their own right. In fact, it is here that *SR2* takes great strides in setting itself apart from *Grand Theft Auto*: the various side-quests are absolutely ridiculous, but in spite (or perhaps, because) of their farfetched concepts, they are wildly enjoyable. The game offers such a vast variety of things to do that it's quite impossible to list them all. Some of the more notable diversions are: segments that allow you to ride through town on a flaming quad bike, earning points for setting objects and people ablaze; an "Insurance Fraud" game where causing massive traffic accidents nets you monetary



reward; and a survival-horror-style mini-game where you have to fend off a horde of hungry zombies, using only limited resources and weaponry.

The game becomes even deeper in that it allows you to customise not only your characters, but also your vehicles, giving you control over their body modifications, paint jobs, rim selection and more. You can even purchase businesses in neighbourhoods that you own, in order to reap some of their profits, as well as enjoy discounts on their services. You'll be able to grow your gang, recruit additional members, and even pile your cohorts into vehicles and drive them straight into enemy territory to fight alongside you. It's nowhere near as serious or moody an experience as *Grand Theft Auto* offers, nor is it as polished, but it's certainly every bit as much fun, if not more so.

Complementing all the frenetic action is a responsive and intuitive control scheme, which not only makes aiming at and blasting your enemies (or innocent bystanders, depending on your disposition) a cinch, but also introduces a very useful 'cruise control' feature. This feature lets you set your vehicle to continue travelling at a constant speed, while allowing you to focus on more important matters (such as concentrating on aiming properly in your latest drive-by shooting). It's not a massive innovation, but it's one that has a significant impact, and it's quite surprising that no one thought of yet.



Visually, *Saints Row 2* is quite passable. It certainly lacks the visual style and panache of Rockstar's latest offering, but it does a competent enough job. There are a few moments when the game is plagued by draw-in issues, or some collision-detection issues, but they do little to detract from the overall experience. The voice acting is mostly top-notch, even if the scripting for the dialogue isn't as well written as it might have been. The slightly repetitive soundtrack offers a good variety of genres, including '80s music, metal and, of course, rap, even if there aren't too many tracks of each genre.

The game is also marred by one or two other niggles, such as the frequently incompetent AI (of both friendly and enemy characters), occasional frame-rate hitches, and some shoddy-looking cut-scenes; but these are easily offset by the sheer fun of playing the game and its unbelievable depth. For those who tire of the single-player games, cooperative and competitive multiplayer modes are available via system-link or online.

Volition has in fact done a sterling job of creating a *Grand Theft Auto* lookalike that functions very, very differently from Rockstar's game. It embraces the same core concepts of sandbox-style hooliganism, but puts a ridiculously implausible, yet also ridiculously entertaining spin on the genre. It's a very tongue-in-cheek take on the open-ended

crime game, and one that most certainly would have benefitted from some slight touching up of its few rough ends, but *Saints Row 2* ultimately manages to be a deep but accessible title that offers anyone who plays it plenty to do, and plenty of fun to be had while doing so. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

Kinda like

Over-the-top mayhem, violence and destruction

For Fans of

Grand Theft Auto

PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

Bottom Line

In spite of its few shortcomings, *Saints Row 2* is a far-fetched but blatantly enjoyable take on sandbox-style crime games.

85

OUT OF 100

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THE
SPEED OF A LIGHT



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SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION

FANS OF THE *CIVILIZATION* series pretty much eat up anything that Sid Meier throws at them, and with good reason: the games that bear his name are good, trend-setting stuff. They're the flagship macrocosmic management titles, but they don't ignore the little things either. In short, *Sid Meier's Civilization* series has set a number of precedents and bars as far as management gaming is concerned. And that's why they are still so popular, so many years after the first release.

Civilization IV: Colonization is a "stand-alone expansion," for want of a better term. The game uses the same engine as *Civilization 4*, and the same core concepts, but instead of dealing with the expected Stone Age to Space Age process that almost every *Civilization* game makes use of, *Colonization* takes a look at a very interesting period of history: the founding of America.

The player may choose to represent one of four nations that were responsible for shaping the early history of what would later become the USA: the Dutch, the English, the Spanish or the French. Each nation has two leaders to choose from, each of whom in turn has different strengths. But no matter what nation the player elects, the idea behind the game never changes: start a colony in the New World, gain enough resources to become self-sustaining, and declare independence. And you have a

limited time in which to achieve that.

While the scenarios are great fun, the true joy of this game comes from the 'free-form' colonisation of a randomly generated map, based on either the Americas or the Caribbean. Because the game covers a shorter time period, and is more focused on the establishment of one country, *Colonization* features far more micromanagement than other *Civilization* titles. The player will be responsible for all trade, for example, as well as the production of goods that can be shipped back to Europe. Additionally, the player needs to govern the rebel sentiment, to time the home nation's attack perfectly. Too early, and the player will be easily defeated. Too late and there won't be enough time left to complete the game successfully. And, just to help matters along, the ever-present monarch of the home nation raises taxes and demands tributes all the time – never enough to bankrupt the player, but often enough to put a spanner in the works.

Colonization is, as with all *Civilization* games, a turn-based title. This is a good thing, because there is a lot to do to ensure success. Dealing with (and converting) natives, harvesting resources, creating goods and shipping them off to Europe, as well as planning a revolution are all fairly involved matters.

Good graphics and sound, as well as an addictive game dynamic, aren't

always enough, though, and like any other *Civilization* title, *Colonization* will be more of a cult classic than a mainstream hit. No matter, though, because fans of the series will almost certainly enjoy this compelling and engrossing game. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Arguing with unreasonable parents

Kind of like

Civilization

For Fans of

Bottom Line

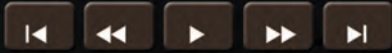
A slow yet addictive look at the American Revolution; this is a must for all *Civilization* fans.

82
OUT OF 100

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



PLAY



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- 500G 5400rpm SATA Hard Disk Drive
- N9700M GT VGA Card - 512MB
- Blue-Ray Rom/DVD/Combo RW
- WiFi 802.11 g/n & Bluetooth
- 1080 HD Resolution
- Dolby HD Audio
- Hybrid TV tuner / 1.3MP Webcam

G50 SPECIFICATIONS

- Intel® Centrino® Processor Technology
- Genuine Windows Vista® Ultimate
- 15.4 WXGA+ Colour Shine LCD
- Core 2 Duo T9400 2.53G Processor
- 4G DDR2 667 memory (2G x 2)
- 320G 5400rpm SATA Hard Disk Drive
- N9700M GT VGA Card - 512MB
- Blue-Ray Rom/DVD/Combo RW
- WiFi 802.11 g/n & Bluetooth
- Dolby HD Audio
- 1.3MP Webcam

**ALONE
in the
DARK**

ATARI

eden

C-HOUSE

18

18

18

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Fax: (051) 430 1144



19:54 Task complete:
Reach the hole

19:54 New task:
Descend into the Agroprom underground



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: CLEAR SKY

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT I come across a game that hates me. Sure, there are the old-school platform games like *Another World* that were so pig-headedly stubborn that they couldn't give a damn if you were the Pope, they'd still hate you; but it's become less and less common these days for a game to go out of its way to be difficult to play. Not just challenging – which *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky* certainly is (in a nice way though) – but difficult... like a spoilt child. While I'm generally a fan of games that cross genres, love post-apocalyptic themes and have a machine capable of standing up to *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s unrelenting engine, it took more than that to keep me playing through the first ten or so gruelling hours of the game – and boy, am I glad I persisted.

Clear Sky puts the player in the dreaded nuclear holocaust a few years before the occurrences of *Shadow of Chernobyl*. Through various narrative loopholes and a couple of things you're just meant to accept, the game reveals new areas for the player to die in explore, as well as a fresh character to play and interesting new characters to rip you off trade with. The premise behind the game remains largely the same as that of *Shadow*: open-ended gameplay with a pseudo-RPG system, tons to do, from simple "Bring me this thing" errands to elaborate chain-quests spanning multiple regions, upgradable items and lots and lots of radiation absolutely everywhere.

The game world, The Zone, is the barren wasteland left behind by the dreadful nuclear meltdown at the Chernobyl power plant in 1986. Spinning around history and the present with a delightful sci-fi twist, the game throws all manner of dangerous, creepy and occasionally rather disturbing challenges at you. Mutant hounds, radioactive anomalies (which I've lovingly termed, "those f&#*ing bubbles of death"), environmental hazards and loads of heavily armed soldiers are the order of the day. However, once you've mastered the means to deal with the bad guys and despatch leprosy canines from 400 feet, the game changes from frightfully unfair to wickedly good fun. At this point, armed to the teeth and packing a good 30 kilos of ammo, it becomes a joy to travel the lands, undertake random quests for steadily improving rewards, and dig deep into the rich and dynamic faction system the game boasts. The enemy AI is keenly aware, deadly with an assault rifle and quite happy to go about their business of capturing key locations, holding back brigand invasions or just hitting the bar for a drink and a chat, all without player intervention. You really do feel a part of The Zone – just another S.T.A.L.K.E.R. looking for answers and struggling for survival. You have a job to do and a core story to follow, but how you do so is completely up to you.

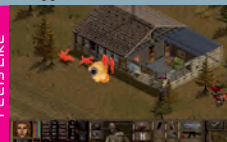
It's not for the easily distracted or

those unwilling to invest some dedicated gameplay time, and the coding has its share of annoying bugs and a hunger for system resources. Nevertheless, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky* is a game that gives back more than it demands in the long run, providing a solid game experience and a feeling of reward at the end of the day. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

A Jagged Alliance FPS

Feels Like



Desolation

For Fans of



Bottom Line

It might be tough to love, but persistence pays off.



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



For every choice, a different destiny.

Tragedy has brought you to a crossroads, and now you must choose.

Revenge or acceptance? Justice or retribution? But choose wisely.

The paths are many, their consequences severe.

And the future of Albion is in your hands.

Who will you become?

Out now.



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For the Fans

FABLE II

Jump in.

 **XBOX 360.**



PURE

IT'S JUST YOU, YOUR custom-built quad bike and a whole lot of air between you and the ground below. As far as arcade racers go (easily identified by the not-realistic-at-all physics and ludicrous hang-time), Pure may as well be given the subtitle, "What the Name Says and Then Some."

You build your bike from thousands of parts, the process made easy for the impatient types by having an auto-build button you can hold down - which slams the pieces together (picking the best bits from the pile). A single button for auto-building a Freestyle bike and another for building a Race bike. Freestyle bikes tend to be better for doing tricks, while Race bikes are perfect for the race and sprint events where speed is essential.

The game is split up into multiple tiers, with each tier having a bunch of races in various types: Sprint, Race and Freestyle. Sprint is your usual, quick multi-lap run around a smaller portion of the unusually large courses reserved for Race and Freestyle, while Freestyle is all about chaining together trick combinations for a high score - *Tony Hawk* style. Progression unlocks upgraded parts that improve your bikes and new slots in the garage for storing your creations.

Racing is straightforward, spiced up by the inclusion of a trick system linked to your boost bar. Initially you can only do Easy tricks, which involve hitting a ramp (pre-loading by flicking the left analogue

stick down and then up as you hit the lip) and then pressing the stick into one of four directions while holding the 'A' button. Land the trick successfully and you gain boost. As your boost bar fills up, it unlocks Medium tricks halfway, which involve pressing the 'B' button instead of 'A', resulting in a more complicated, longer and harder-to-land trick. Fill the boost all the way, and you unlock Hard tricks, assigned to the 'Y' button. Fill the boost a little more, and Special Tricks are unlocked, which involve holding the left and right bumper buttons in the air and pressing a direction. Each of the multiple characters you can select to play as has a special Special Trick that looks like something out of the best episode of 'Don't Do This At Home. You Will Die', a fictional show that should exist.

Because the boost bar is linked to which tricks are available, using up boost will remove the Hard or Medium trick buttons respectively if you use up all the boost. The only exception to this is the Special Trick, which, once gained, will remain available even if you boost to empty, which is actually preferable to do before a big jump, because executing a successful Special Trick will instantly refill your boost to max (and net you another Special Trick) when you land.

It's pure, simple and lots of fun (especially the later courses, which simply defy description in terms of just how far and high you fly). It's worth mentioning that *Pure* has a highly enjoyable soundtrack with

prime selections from the rock and drum-and-bass genres.

Online multiplayer is included for two to 16 players (and AI opponents can fill in the empty slots to make for a full grid), though the game features no local split-screen or system link. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



For Fans of

Most ATV games

Better Than

Arcade Racers

PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

Bottom Line

Exhilarating no-frills fun that doesn't try to be anything but enjoyment.

89

OUT OF 100



LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME

LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME is essentially exactly the same game that we were treated to with the *LEGO Star Wars* series and the *LEGO Indiana Jones* game. You're still going to be running around every corner of the game's levels, smashing every breakable object in the hope that hundreds of LEGO studs will magically pop out of the remains and provide the player with more of the virtual currency that will allow him/her to purchase more of the locked items that the game so prominently features. The only real change is the improved visual clarity and the theme of the game.

The core game (and where most of the game's 'story' is told) sees you playing as Batman and Robin as you attempt to recapture a bunch of iconic villains from the DC universe, who have escaped from Arkham Asylum. If you're playing with a buddy, each of you will control one of the characters. If you don't have any friends, the AI will control whichever character you aren't, and you can freely swap between characters on the fly to take advantage of their unique special abilities. The story is conveyed through cut-scenes that play out periodically throughout the game, although there is no dialogue during the cinematic sequences. The characters are almost completely silent, displaying their emotions, personalities and reactions to their current situation through a series of facial animations and body language, along with some audible reactions such as grunts and screams. These

cut-scenes are often hilarious, even without the dialogue. Batman comes across as his usual hard-ass self, the Joker is playful yet maniacal and Poison Ivy uses her feminine wiles to manipulate the main protagonists. It's a treat to see all these beloved characters come to life in LEGO form. As mentioned before, the gameplay hasn't changed much. Batman and Robin will be able to change their suits at various locations around the map, which will give them various different abilities when certain suits are worn. For example, one of these suits allows Batman to glide between platforms and Robin gets a scuba suit that allows him to swim underwater. Eventually you'll be able to visit Arkham Asylum and take control of the villains that you've recaptured, allowing you to use their special abilities to reach areas previously unreachable when playing through the main campaign as Batman and Robin. All the other gameplay elements are intact. You'll still need to break certain objects to gain LEGO pieces that the characters will use to build vehicles and other objects needed to progress through the levels, and there's still a massive amount of extra content that can be bought using the studs collected throughout the game. The game retains the cutesy look that the series is known for, but the graphics are actually surprisingly good for a game of this nature. On the audio front, there's plenty of epic superhero-style orchestral music. The sound effects are nothing to write home about, since they're

the usual sounds of LEGO pieces breaking and henchmen being slapped around that you'll constantly be hearing throughout the game. Overall, *LEGO Batman* is more of the same, so if you didn't like the other *LEGO* titles, don't bother with this one. If, however, you love the series, then this game is a definite must have. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

For Fans of

LEGO and Batman

The Dark Knight

Worse Than

PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

\$

👤

🔊

🎮

Bottom Line

It's another LEGO game, just with a new theme. Still a lot of fun though.

75

OUT OF 100

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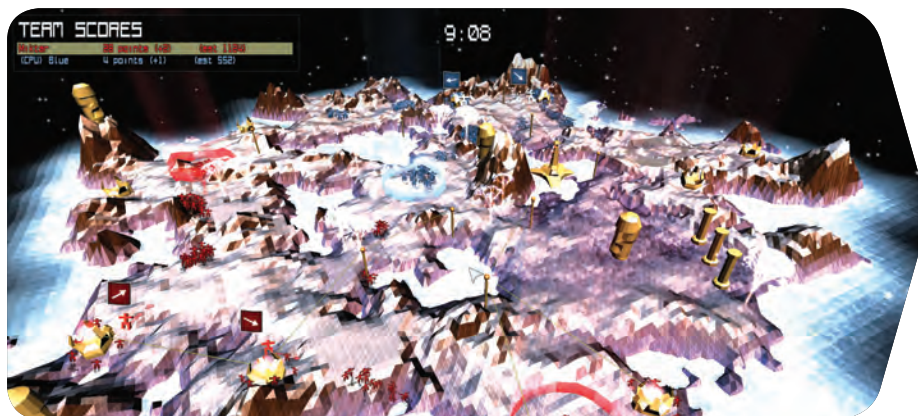
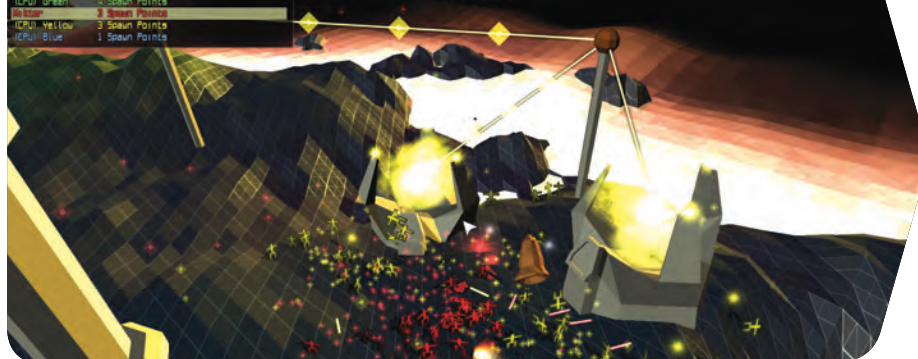
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MULTIWINIA: SURVIVAL OF THE FLATTEST

THERE IS AN ELEGANT simplicity in how *Multiwinia* represents the real-time strategy genre, and not just in the charming retro-evolved graphical theme it shares with its single-player predecessor, *Darwinia*.

Whereby modern RTS convention aims for engrossing combat via unit variety in a carefully maintained rock-paper-scissors unit balance structure (for the most part), *Multiwinia* forgoes such things entirely and leaves you with just one unit, the Multiwinian. It boils down to how you utilise your force. Each player is handed the same number of units every 'cycle' (with exceptions being the more exotic game types or when a player captures a new Multiwinian spawner, thus giving him/her an additional burst of units with each cycle), and from there it's all about position, tactical choice and when to execute one of the many over-the-top specials that sporadically drop down in crates.

Battles quickly devolve into magnificent Multiwinian massacres with nukes being

fired from offshore submarines (a straight walk-on cameo from the other Introversion multiplayer title, *Defcon*), meteorites raining down upon the landscape, and Futurwinians abducting your units and then establishing their own base, which abruptly changes the nature of the conflict.

Variety in the specials, game types and quirky nuances, wrapped up in a welcome straightforward chasteness, makes *Multiwinia* a contemporary party game, perfect for LAN parties and online play, but above all else, for fun.

All that's missing is a few staple functions to facilitate easier online play (such as password-protected games), which we have it on good authority are being patched in. If you've never played *Darwinia* either and own an Xbox 360, you may want to consider waiting for *Darwinia+* (due next year), which combines *Darwinia* and *Multiwinia* in one appealing XBLA package. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

MORE OPINIONS

Because the name of the game is *Multiwinia*, we asked some of our local online regulars to give their opinions on the game. Therefore, you have multiple opinions. We're clever that way...

KHARRAK

Multiwinia is quite pleasant in its more relaxed approach to the RTS genre. There is little micromanagement, and the main body of your army can hold their own, unless bared down upon by a superior force. As a result, the player, though they do need to keep an eye on things, doesn't constantly need to dash back and fro to babysit their units. This doesn't mean that the game is slow paced or boring by any degree, as quite a thrill builds up as players battle over points, rush to send Multiwinians to take or hold important points, or obtain powerful abilities.

CLAUDIO "CHIPPI" DE SA

Multiwinia is an inconsistent game. Lingering connection issues and the curious lack of high-essential multiplayer lobby features make the offering feel incomplete. While unsurprising for an indie development studio that lives or dies by the success of their current title, frustration is resultant nonetheless. However, the above minor blemishes don't undermine the game at all: once the opposing sides begin exchanging varying degrees of two-dimensional deaths, its undeniably enjoyable nature is immediately apparent, even though the game doesn't feature the depth of triple-A strategy titles. This simple verity annuls the above negative points and earns the game a hearty recommendation.

Defcon

Better Than

As Good As

G.I. Joe + Fireworks

PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

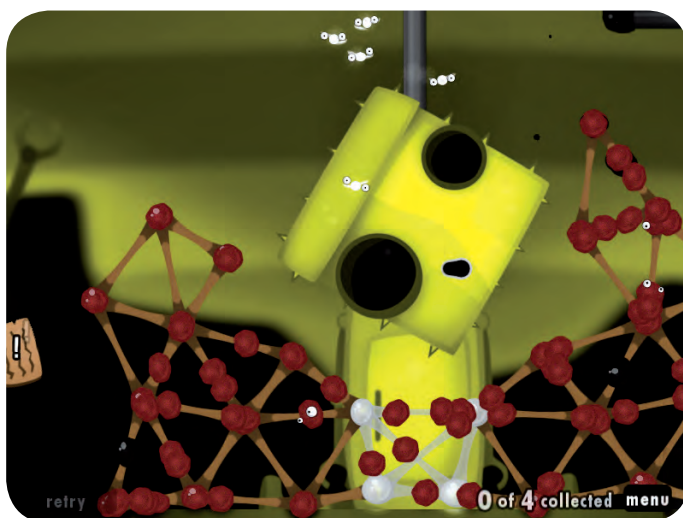
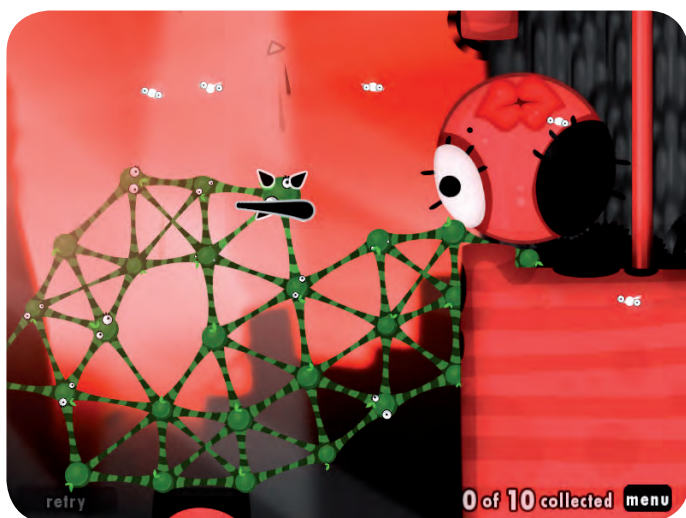
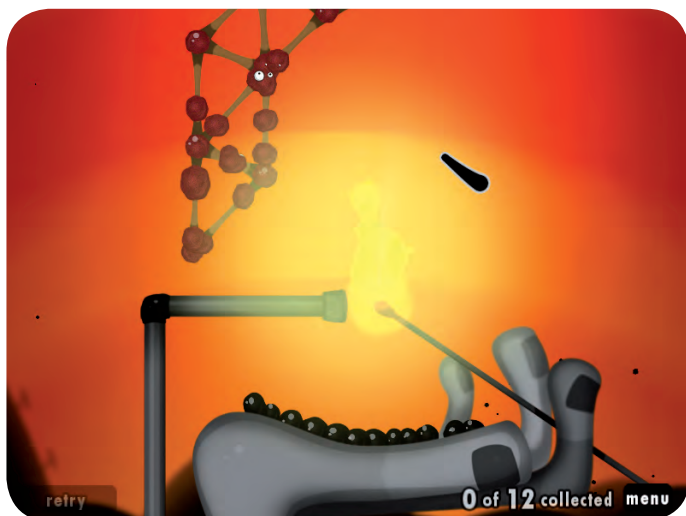
DS

MOB

Bottom Line

All the real-time strategy fun with none of the overbearing 'unit-type' fat.

83 OUT OF 100



WORLD OF GOO

THESE DAYS, WHEN A developer boasts that its game has PhysX built in, it really means that one can expect error-prone ragdolls and crates/barrels with overzealous hang times. As is often the case with 'new' technology in mainstream implementation, it's done more for effect than anything else. PhysX is cool – no doubt about that – but once you've seen your millionth Nazi clipping in and out of the floor, jiggling about as it tries desperately to pretend it's a real sack of meat and bones, you've seen the height of what ragdolls seem able to offer.

In a refreshing case of substance over effect, *World of Goo* takes an old idea and breathes new, wobbly physical life into it by putting the physics where it truly matters. Based on a Web-based prototype (in which you literally built a tower by dragging balls of connected Goo to form struts), *World of Goo* takes the idea further by presenting puzzles in which the only way up, forward, over, down or around, is to build yourself a structure capable of overcoming the challenge, using the least amount of goo balls possible.

Some levels are windy, one level is set in a rotating tube that rolls your tumbling Goo structure around, while other levels

involve bracing your structure up and up an oesophagus as you climb to freedom. That is all I can say about the levels, because any kind of spoiler about a level (or the new types of Goo to be found) would be sacrilege. *World of Goo* is as much about the journey as the destination. The imagination, creativity and variety of every level are a crisp reminder of just how much fun a puzzle game can be, easily comparable to the postmodern antics of *Portal*.

Each level has an 'Obsessive Completion Distinction (OCD)' challenge, tempting you to complete the level in the least amount of moves, or to save an above-average amount of Goo. The Goo you save isn't useless either, as each additional Goo ball goes towards the 'Tower of Goo' mini-game, which involves building as high of a tower as possible: your tower height is visible for all the world to see as a cloud floating in the background of their tower. This is the future of passive-aggressive multiplayer, as you attempt to one-up that one cloud of some guy's tower just a little bit above the tip of your tower, only to have the whole structure start its slow collapse to the side.

Each of the five chapters has its own art theme and catchy music, setting it apart and making it individually memorable. Even

the minimalistic cut-scenes have their own certain *je ne sais quoi*. Not bad at all, then, for a team of four people. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



As Good As

Lemmings

As Fun As

Bubble bath

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Utterly fantastic, tons of fun and delightfully wicked.

89 OUT OF 100

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

IN 1946, INSPIRED TO avoid the horror of World War II, Albert Einstein drags his experimental "chronosphere" onto the Trinity nuclear testing range in New Mexico and flips the switch. Using stuff like science and hard sums, the device instantly transports him to Landsberg, Germany, in 1924, conveniently coinciding with a young Adolf Hitler's release from the local prison. Despite the latter having already fired up the Nazi party and committed his rather questionable socio-political rhetoric to writing in *Mein Kampf*, Einstein somehow manages to preclude the ensuing genocide and 50 years of national guilt with a simple handshake. Maybe all Hitler needed was some attention.

Anyway, with the threat of Nazi Germany thus excised from history, the Soviet Union waxes to great and terrible power under Joseph Stalin, undoing all of Einstein's hard work and proving that science and maths aren't anywhere near as useful as your teacher wants you to believe. The thug proceeds to lay happy waste to the Eurasian landmass, staking legally untenable but convincingly hostile claims to any place that looks like it could sustain potatoes, vodka factories, and wretched peasants trudging barefoot through the snow, while mainland Europe scrambles to form an allied counteroffensive against the invading Red Army.

Red Alert was presented as a prequel to the preceding (and debut) *Command &*

Conquer title, *Tiberian Dawn*, and the series' perennial villain, Kane, is infrequently seen hobnobbing with Stalin throughout the Soviet campaign, subtly suggesting that all this silly empire business is really some covert corporate mandate of the Brotherhood of Nod.

Initially developed for MS-DOS and Windows 95 on PC, the game was subsequently ported to the PS 1 later the same year, and this version was then ported to the PSP in 2008. To mark the thirteenth anniversary of the game's release, as well as promoting the all-new *Red Alert 3*, those nice people over at EA decided to re-release an XP- and Vista-ready version of *Red Alert* as freeware. **NAG**



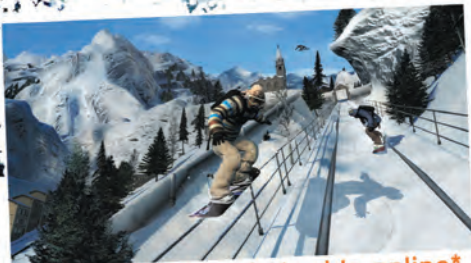
COMMAND & CONQUER: FRANCHISE STORM

Spanning nine lead titles, a veritable host of expansion packs and spin-offs, and more than 21 million units sold to date, the *Command & Conquer* franchise has mounted a more or less constant offensive on game release schedules for over a decade already. Its prolific legacy has recently earned it a place in the *Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition 2008*, including top spots for "Biggest Selling RTS Series", "Most Number of Platforms for an RTS", and "Longest Running Actor in a Video Game Role" for Joe Kucan, who has dutifully shaved his head to 'star' as Kane for 13 years now. Complete the set with:

- Tiberian Dawn [1995]
- Red Alert [1996]
- The Covert Operations [1996]
- Red Alert: Counterstrike [1997]
- Red Alert: The Aftermath [1997]
- Sole Survivor [1997]
- Red Alert: Retaliation [1998]
- Tiberian Sun [1999]
- Red Alert 2 [2000]
- Firestorm [2000]
- Red Alert: Yuri's Revenge [2001]
- Renegade [2002]
- Generals [2003]
- Generals: Zero Hour [2003]
- Tiberium Wars [2007]
- Kane's Wrath [2008]
- Red Alert 3 [2008]

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HO, HO, HO!

YOUR DECEMBER BONUS WILL soon be burning a hole in your pocket, but don't worry: we'll point you in the right direction! Last month the big hype was about Nehalem (the new CPU from Intel), *Far Cry 2* and *Tomb Raider*... Well, actually just being able to watch Lara in HD was the real source of excitement. I can tell you without any doubt that they are all stunning and well worth the money.

At least I have Nehalem to drool over – Intel's new 45nm 'tock'! This CPU is truly cookie-jar heaven, and ushers in the time to get rid of your old MOBO that has been slowing your productivity down. Although there are two pin options, your socket 775-based MOBO won't work with this new CPU: the memory controller is no longer on the board. Yes, you guessed it: it is on the CPU and a few AMD lovers will shout, "You see... AMD was right!" Yes, but has Intel perfected it? Find out in this issue...

In this issue, we also take a long, hard look at a fabulous mobile computing offering from MSI – by far the most impressive desktop replacement option we have ever seen. It scored 5.4 in Vista's System Performance rating. Yeah, I know... it isn't the 'be-all' of tests, which is why there is no mention of it in the review. However, it does help to give you an overall idea. Still think I should be shot for mentioning Vista's rating? Well, how about this: we played *Far Cry 2* on the MSI G720 notebook with V-Sync on, 4x antialiasing and DX10. Furthermore, 'Tree', 'Fire' and 'Physic' were all set to 'Very High' and the rest of the game options were set to 'High'...

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Another **rAge** has also come and gone, and in my opinion, three things really stood out:

- The Intel and GIGABYTE overclocking booth where four SA guys from SystemShock shattered the SA 3DMark records using GIGABYTE boards and a delectable Intel 9770 CPU.
- The Canadian developer who showed us *Far Cry 2* – "OMG, what a game!"
- The girl dressed in purple with her Core 2... ahem... all the booth babes rocked!

If you have any questions, simply send them to letters@tidemedia.co.za with the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A'.

Cheers all, 2009 is going to be legen...

Wait for it...

Len Nery
Hardware Manager

SAPPHIRE HD 4870 GOES TOXIC!

SAPPHIRE TECHNOLOGY HAS ANNOUNCED the global availability of a new HD 4870 TOXIC Edition in its latest family of high-performance graphics cards.

The SAPHIRE HD 4870 TOXIC Edition features the award-winning – and SAPHIRE exclusive – Vapor-X cooler, SAPHIRE's implementation of Vapour Chamber Technology (VCT). This advanced cooling solution is used for the core logic and together with three heat pipes and thermally controlled fan venting outside the case provide both efficient and quiet cooling. The TOXIC edition ships overclocked, yet has scope for further overclocking by enthusiasts because of the Vapor-X cooler. The SAPHIRE HD 4870 TOXIC has 512MB of high-performance GDDR5 memory, clocked at 1,000MHz (4Gb/sec effective), and the GPU core is pre-overclocked to 780MHz. Supporting AMD CrossFireX technology, two high-speed connectors on each card allow two, three or even four cards to be daisy-chained together for enhanced performance when installed on a CrossFireX-enabled motherboard.



TV ON YOUR MONITOR

With Compro's VideoMate V200F, you can turn any monitor or projector into a TV and multimedia centre. The VideoMate V200F delivers high-resolution, standalone TV at resolutions of 1,680 x 1,050, 1,600 x 1,200 and 1,440 x 900. Watching TV on your CRT/LCD/PDP has never been easier; and best of all, no drivers are required. You simply connect the VideoMate V200F to your monitor, add the cable TV feed, and Bob's your uncle! Try working while watching TV with PIP (Picture In Picture) on your monitor... Impossible.

HARDWARE Q&A

"I WANT TO UPGRADE MY PC. My system's specs are as follows: Athlon 64 6000+ 3GHz dual-core CPU, two 8500s in SLI, two 160GB HDDs in RAID, 4GB DDR800 RAM (although my PC only displays 2.7GB in XP and 3.5GB in Vista), a Foxconn C51XEM2AA MOBO and a 500W PSU. What has to be upgraded, or must I just start over? I was planning on buying a 4870, but a 4850 will suit my budget better (I am only 15)."

Danie Beresford

NAG: The Foxconn MOBO you have is truly a beauty and was in fact the first board released with NVIDIA's nForce 5 chipset. This board has some really cool features such as Teaming, MediaShield and nTune5. The board supports up to 8GB of RAM, and the fact that you are only seeing 3.5GB in Vista is rather strange to say the least. Perhaps the memory is a cheap brand or even faulty. You have not listed the brand, so we cannot

Now the ball is in your court. Send your questions to letters@tidemedia.co.za with the heading 'Hardware Q&A'.

help you there. Do you have a friend with four or more RAM modules you could borrow to perform a quick test? The CPU is cool and the 500W PSU is okay, but will struggle to support a decent SLI setup. We would firstly upgrade the PSU to at least an 850W unit. The key here is to go for a good brand and not some cheap and nasty unit.

Your GPUs will need to be NVIDIA GPUs because your board doesn't support CrossFire. If you decide to buy an AMD/ATI card, you'll therefore only be able to utilise one card on your MOBO. Obviously, the key here is to buy the fastest card you are able to afford. Our honest opinion: you won't be sorry going for the AMD/ATI 4850. Your HDDs in RAID? We would only go for RAID 5 or 6, but understand that RAID doesn't give you significant performance gains over a single solution. We would rather suggest investing in an HDD with 32MB of cache.

IKONIK RAISES THE BAR

IKONIK may not be a name familiar with most people and indeed, when one says it's a relatively new company that manufactures various computer parts such as PSUs and cases, it would be easy to dismiss them as another low end case manufacturer cashing in on gamers and enthusiasts alike. We were recently given the opportunity to see and use some of their products in Taipei, and we can truly say nothing could be further from the truth. While the company does have the lower end units, their main focus is power users, and as such not only is the build quality incredible, but the designers seem to be in touch with the needs of performance PC users. The company has already picked up over 15 awards from highly respected sites such as OCWorkbench, Guru3D, Tweaktown and Tech Power Up to name but, few for their various products.

The RA-X10 pictured here is their premium case coming in two versions. The Liquid model and the SIM model which feature software control for fans and temperature monitoring. This may not be a first, however IKONIK's system seems perfected. Look out for both the RA-X10 SIM and Vulcan 1200WATT PSU reviews in NAG soon. www.ikonik.com



LENOVO THINKCENTRE A62

Lenovo's new ThinkCentre A62 is one of the most cost-effective and stable ThinkCentre PCs ever. Lenovo claims that it is among the most environmentally friendly desktops on the market, and comes with such features as Dash 1.1, a highly touted remote management system and express repair, which allows the system to rapidly fix many system corruptions. The ThinkCentre A62 is Lenovo's latest PC offering in a summer 2008 blitz aimed at helping businesses with cost-effective computing solutions.

"IT departments, especially in the business world, don't like change," said Rashid Wally, Country General Manager, South Africa, Lenovo. "The new ThinkCentre A62 was built to provide business customers with longer PC buying cycles. It combines top-notch performance, manageability and environmental responsibility in a high value machine."



Series 1 takes a bow and clears the stage for Series II WATCH THIS SPACE!!!



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DREAM MACHINE

AND SO THE COOKIE CRUMBLES...

THIS MONTH YOU WILL see a yummy Samsung monitor replacing previously advantaged hardware... Welcome ladies and gentlemen, you will be stroked and loved on this page. May you soar high on the wings of our crested eagle bird-like thingy atop our two provocative dancers!

Next month we make space for the new Intel Nehalem CPU, so keep a eye out for the hot review.

If you have any questions or suggestions, send us a mail with the subject heading 'Dream Machine' to letters@tidemedia.co.za.

Welcome to the drool....



PROCESSOR

Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650 (R8,228)
Intel Corporation [011] 806-4530



KEYBOARD

Enermax Aurora (R447)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



MONITOR

Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD (R5,499)
Samsung 0860 726 7864



COOLING

Zalman Reserator XT (R3,456)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



MOUSE

Cyber Snipa Stinger (R399)
Axiz [011] 237-7000



MOTHERBOARD

ASUS Extreme Rampage (R5,789)
ASUS [011] 783-5450



POWER SUPPLY

Zalman ZM1000-HP 1000W (R2,033)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



GRAPHICS CARD

Sapphire HD 4870 X2 (R6,400)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



STORAGE

WD Caviar SE16 500GB (R755)
Drive Control [011] 201-8927



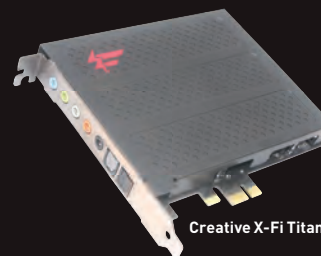
MEMORY

Corsair TWIN3X2048-1800C7DF 6 (R4,699)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



CASE

Cooler Master Cosmos S (R1,818)
Sonic Informed [011] 314-5800



SOUND

Creative X-Fi Titanium Fatal1ty (R1,799)
Creative





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Hardwired



by Neo Sibeko

My Ultimate Rig! (Part 1)

WHILE WE DO HAVE the Dream Machine in the magazine every month, featuring only the best components available locally and all of the hardware that has impressed us, for the next three months I will be detailing a dream machine with a difference. It will cater to a diehard enthusiast, but be practical enough for the most hardcore gamers. More than a component list, it will detail settings for the each component (because I'm an enthusiast at heart the system can't be running standard settings). It has to be able to compete for a position on HWBOT, worthy of praise on the online e-zine "The Overclocker", but handle the odd game every once in a while with all details turned on full tilt.

There will be three rigs – one for the LGA775 platform, one for AMD AM3 platform and obviously one for the Core i7, which, while perhaps a bit immature at this point, will certainly mature into a powerful platform soon enough. The system I will detail this month is the LGA775 platform, as it's the only platform out of all of them that has reached its peak component-wise, and has compatibility almost guaranteed. With the AMD system, we are all waiting on the Deneb quad core CPUs and, in particular, the FX line to come back and as such, we will be tackling the Ci7 system next month with the help of the GIGABYTE EX58-Extreme.

ULTIMATE CORE 2 MACHINE

MOTHERBOARD: ASUS Extreme Rampage (BIOS 0601) – Without a doubt the best X48 motherboard and probably the best LGA775 motherboard ever made. This motherboard is legendary and brings together the advantages of X48 with the overclocking ability of P45 chipsets.

CPU: Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650 at 4.5GHz (450x10) – I could have gone with the QX9770, but it's a well known fact that 9650 CPUs not only run cooler than the 9770 CPUs, they also overclock better and require less voltage, and as such it's a natural choice.

RAM: 4 x 1GB OCZ PLATINUM DDR3 1800MHz (2.05V @ 1800MHz CL7-7-7-21) – The best DDR3 memory available in the country, and maybe in the entire world. This memory has validated and finished 3D benchmarks at 2,133MHz CL7-7-7-21 1T @ 2.27V. Nothing I've seen or used is even close to matching this memory.

STORAGE: Intel X25 80GB SATAII SSD + 2 x WD Caviar Black 1TB Drive – There's no beating the Intel Solid State Drives for outright performance, as they are literally limited by the SATAII interface. This incredible speed negates the need for a separate scratch file drive, and the two WD Black series 1TB drives provide top performance and high reliability and obviously plenty of storage.

VGA: ASUS Radeon HD 4870X2 TOP X2 (850MHz/950MHz on all four cores) – There's no question about it; the 4870X2 is the fastest graphics card money can buy. When there are two of them in the system, it's the most powerful graphics configuration available on any consumer platform with more than 2 teraflops of raw power. As these cards are water cooled, they will easily clock to the given clock speeds, further providing

unparalleled performance.

PSU: GIGABYTE Odin Pro 1200W – Easily the best PSU I have ever used, powering a quad core system at 5.5GHz and two 4870X2 cards with power to spare.

MONITOR: Samsung SyncMaster T260 – The best looking monitor I have ever had the pleasure of working with. There may be bigger monitors out there, but this one is just right, and the quality is spectacular.

COOLING: Swiftech Triple Radiator (MCR320), CPU Water Block (APOGEE GTZ), Pump (MCP655), Reservoir (MCRES Micro Rev2), two Danger Den VGA Blocks (DD-4870-X2) – Only the best cooling components are used and best of all, they are easily available from several online stores. The cooling makes this entire machine possible.

CHASSIS: IKONIK RA-X10 SIM – Not the cheapest case around, but you get what you pay for. The build quality and attention to detail are incredible. Best of all, it looks brilliant and has plenty of room to fit all the components.

The above system would obviously run Windows Vista Ultimate 64-bit Edition, and would run in the above configuration almost always. The CPU could be substituted for a Core 2 Duo E8600 for a lighter load on the PSU and a higher clock speed of around 4.8GHz, but the 300MHz gained wouldn't be worth it if the average CPU running temperature is the same as it is for the quad core, which is very possible, as voltage and clock scaling isn't linear. More often than not, to stabilize a 4.7GHz clock requires 1.65 volts or a little more, compared to 1.5V you would need for 4.5GHz.

Where power is concerned, this machine with Catalyst 8.10 would be pushing around 028,000 points in 3DMark06, and more than P18000 points in 3DMark Vantage. There isn't a single game that cannot be enjoyed at the native resolution of the monitor (1920x1200), and some games may even enjoy 8X AA. Of course, there would be many more things to add like a mouse, keyboard, sound card, optical drive and such, but the basics have been covered and, if one has to spend a hefty amount of money on a machine instead of building a pre-built machine, I would rather build the above. Not only is it cheaper, but it uses only quality components and is highly configurable. Most importantly, there isn't a faster machine you can buy off the shelf, not from Alienware, Voodoo or any other performance PC manufacturer. A system like this is not just a pointless exercise in excessiveness, but it's about extracting the most from some of the best components the market has to offer.

As an enthusiast, if I was ever to build the ultimate machine, this would be it. Building such a machine would need at least three days for leak testing and such, but when complete, would be the machine to fit the best of both worlds, striking the perfect combination between a competition machine and a gaming rig.

Next month we'll be building the Core i7 machine, featuring the Core i7 Extreme 965, the GIGABYTE EX58-Extreme, and powered by the IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU and featuring three-way SLI. **NAG**



A system like this is not just a pointless exercise in excessiveness, but it's about extracting the most from some of the best components the market has to offer.





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Reviewer's Diary



by Derrick Cramer

A case of opinion

GONE ARE THE DAYS of dull cream that adorned many a desk. Gamers, and with them, the general public, have risen up with one voice and shouted, "Away with the simple, away with the bland, we want Shiny!" A rather out of place introduction no doubt, but effectively it summarises the situation of one of the biggest portions of the PC-related hardware market – cases.

As any self respecting gamer will tell you, a case is the criteria by which all e-peens (I can say that right?) are measured at LANs. After all, a simple black and silver case with no side window, nor any case lighting must surely be inferior on the inside too, right? Serving no better purpose than housing your expensive hardware, the case has little to no effect on the experience of gaming. So why then do we spend so much on something so, for want of a better term, useless? There are three types of people who buy cases nowadays, all wanting something very different, and so, three basic case markets now exist.

THE CASUAL USER

The casual user has somewhat simple tastes, and is often not very involved with their PC. If it does what they want it to, they are more than happy with it. Casual users often have plain cases, lacking side windows, mesh grills, or any lighting, and use the case as a means of storage and nothing more. They are harmless and keep to themselves. The plus side of cases targeting the casual user is simple; they are cheap and effective, doing exactly what they intend to – sitting on your desk, housing your components.

THE GAMER

Ah the gamer. Passionate about all forms of PC entertainment, they would rather invest money in games and other peripherals than be bothered with case upgrades. With this smaller budget in mind, gamers want something appealing, that won't however break the bank. And so, the gamer's case was born. Often crafted out of cheap, flimsy materials, with perspex windows, intricate designs, and lights poking out of every orifice, the gamer's case has one role. To provide a cheap way of looking good. Thinking back to rAge, the amount of people who

arrived at the NAG LAN with a Raidmax case shows that cheap and pretty sells. The downfall of the Raidmax cases, and in general any budget gaming case that suffers from being carted to the regular LAN, becomes apparent upon further inspection, as you begin to see the effects of cheap. Dents in the thin aluminium, scratches on the glossy paint, cracks in the Perspex. These are what owners of cheap cases have come to expect.

THE INTELLECTUAL

The intellectual is born when one goes through either of the above stages, and comes to the realisation that, whether the case is cheap and functional, or it looks good at a budget price, this is simply not enough. The intellectual uses more than opinion to base his decision on, and so the real benefits of a case becomes apparent. Benefits like space, cable management, good airflow, ease of installation, and above all, quality, are a consideration for this chap. While these cases often cost insane amounts (from a reasonable R800 to a rather steep R3,000), they end up paying for themselves as well as keeping the intellectual happy.

THE BOTTOM LINE

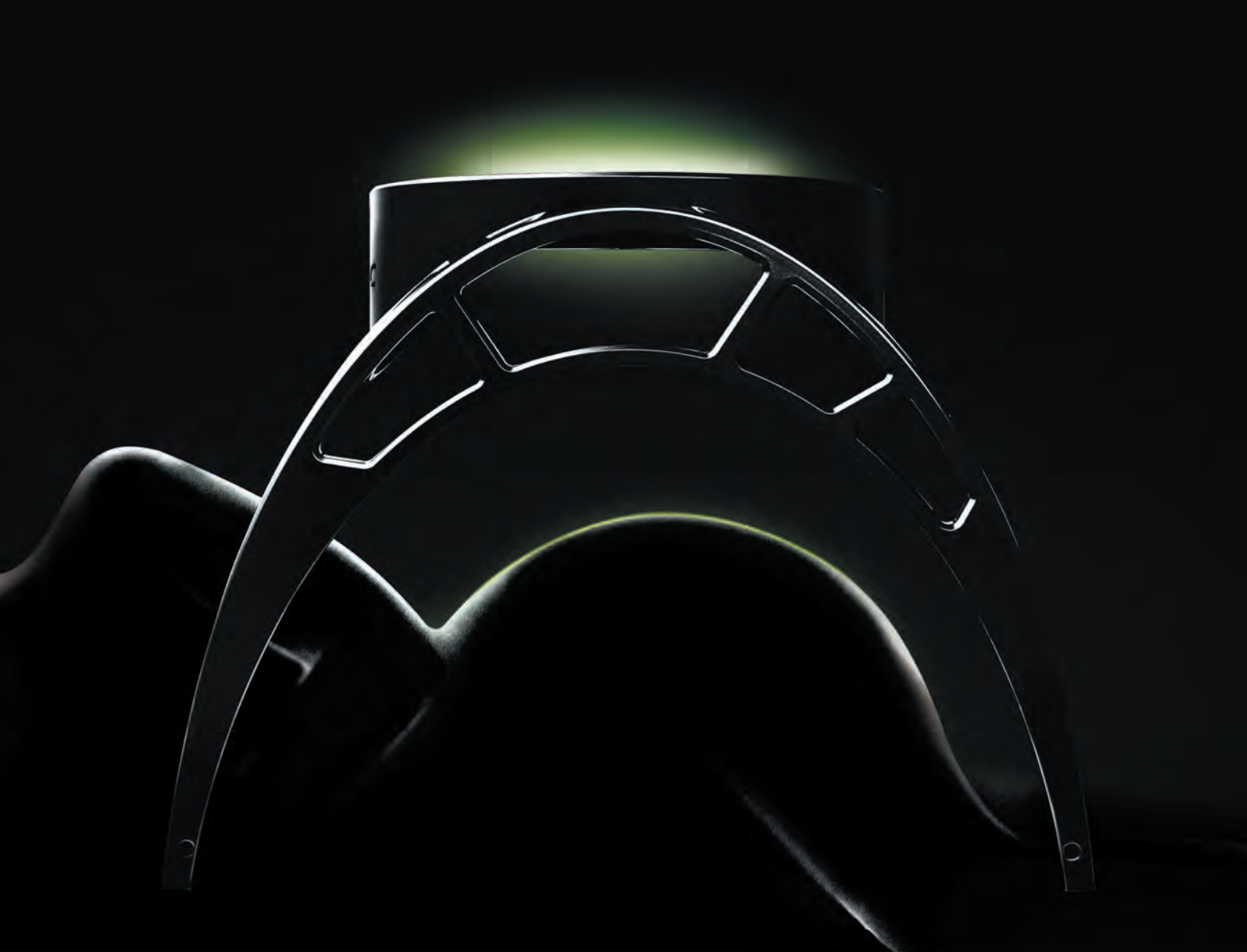
While I may prefer a bench table for overclocking purposes, taking said bench table to LANs eventually became a pain in my life I could rather do without. After one look at the condition my old Raidmax Sagitta was in (brought about by extensive lanning), it became clear that I needed more. With an upgrade to a case whose price I would've cringed at the mere thought of a year ago, I became a happier person. My cables are now neatly managed, the airflow my case has is far superior to all but my bench table, I have space for hardware that was previously unusable, and my case looks, above all, elegant and classy.

This is not to say that gamers should cease buying cheap gaming cases, nor should the casual user fork out for something that will offer them no more functionality than their previous case. Once you have a taste of quality, you won't look at cases the same way, and the small benefits end up justifying the price asked of the high end cases. **NAG**



Serving no better purpose than housing your expensive hardware, the case has little to no effect on the experience of gaming. So why then do we spend so much on something so, for want of a better term, useless?





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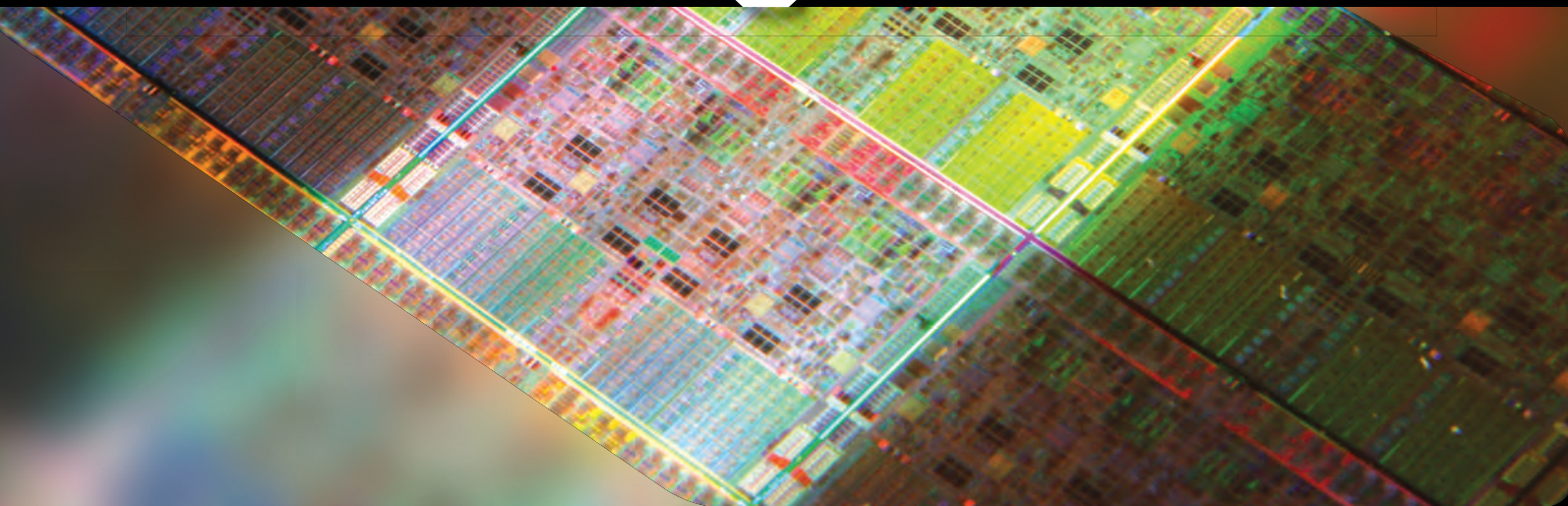
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Intel Core i7: Introducing Nehalem



THERE'S NO DENYING THAT the Core 2, when introduced in mid 2006, caused possibly the biggest stir amongst gamers and enthusiasts. Not only did the CPUs offer new instruction sets, and keep a limited degree of backward compatibility with specific 955 based motherboards, but most importantly the Core 2 line ushered in a new era in performance.

The performance gains and, specifically the difference between the Core 2 family and the previous CPUs from their main competitor were so vast, they were beyond anything ever thought possible by anyone outside of Intel. That was more than two years ago, and the Core 2 has enjoyed immense success through its various iterations. We enjoyed G0 stepping CPUs on the original 65nm CPUs, which improved overclocking and made new models available to the public. After that we were introduced to the 45nm CPUs under the Penryn code name, which was keeping in line with Intel's Tick-Tock strategy.

As if that weren't enough, Intel refined their manufacturing process and gave us, what is without a doubt, the highlight of the entire Core 2 series of CPUs, at least for the enthusiast, in the Core 2 Duo E8600. A 10X multiplier, and the sought after E0 stepping made sure that the Core 2 Duo line would

"The performance gains and, specifically the difference between the Core 2 family and the previous CPUs from their main competitor were so vast, they were beyond anything ever thought possible by anyone outside of Intel. "

go out with a bang. New Quad cores were also introduced; however they did not carry a new model, as C0 stepping QX9770 CPUs were already available.

In keeping with their new found strength after the tragedy that was everything Netburst related, Intel went on to produce some solid chipsets for their CPUs, with the P45 coming last, but arguably being the best out of the entire series since the 965.

This was our world, we were happy and all was good. Then news of Intel's new Nehalem architecture threatened our peace, and many concerns were raised by the enthusiasts and gamers alike. As it turns out, most of them were justified. However, we must be mindful of a very simple thing, but one that could easily be forgotten. From experience with the competitors' parts,

we must keep in mind that a first attempt at integrating a memory controller on the die can be a very tricky affair. Intel's bold move to not only include a DDR3 IMC that's 192-bits wide would seem to be a disaster waiting to happen. Fortunately though, it's actually better than what you might think.

The question on many people's minds who have not read the online reviews is, "Is the Core i7 a worthwhile upgrade?" The simple truth as it stands right now is purely dependant on the individual. We will tell you the bad, then we will let you in on the not so bad, and then most importantly we will tell you why the Ci7 is possibly the most significant CPU in Intel's recent history.

What will undoubtedly be a great irritation for many is the CPU cooler change. Be warned that your current CPU cooler is next

"The Core i7 manages to be a CPU highly tuned for multi threaded applications, but still manages to outpace the Core 2 in single thread performance as well."

to useless when we are talking about Core i7 CPUs, or at least the LGA1366 socket they currently employ. Not only is the core bigger physically, but the CPU mounting spaces are further apart. That change in spacing means that a simple DIY job will not do the trick. Many CPU coolers will not have enough surface area to cover the new CPU effectively, and some others may just not cope with the newer thermal envelope of the Core i7.

To make sure cooling issues did not spoil the party for us, Intel generously provided an Aftermarket cooler in the form of the well respected Thermalright Ultra 120. This model was exactly the same as the previous LGA775 model, the only difference being that it had an LGA1366 compatible back plate and retention mechanism.

What may also not sit well with users are the limitations of the type of DDR3 memory

supported by the new platform.

This is more likely to affect enthusiasts and gamers with overclocked computers more than anyone else. Since the introduction of DDR3 memory, various manufacturers have, as always, competed for the highest DDR3 speed rating. While no speed past 1,333MHz is JEDEC approved, we have memory modules rated at 2,200MHz, and the vast majority of performance sets rated at 1,800MHz. What is common with all these memory kits is that they need more than the official 1.5V the DDR3 specification calls for. Most of these sets need at least 1.9V to reach their designated speeds. The Core i7 CPU, for a reason unknown to us at the time of writing, limits the amount of voltage that can be supplied to the RAM to a low 1.65V. In fact, on the motherboard we used to test the Core

i7, there are specific instructions letting one know that should 1.65V be exceeded, the user risks causing permanent and obviously irreversible damage to the CPU.

It should be fairly obvious by now, how this might cause problems. That expensive DDR set you purchased will never to run its maximum rated speed, nor is it a complete set anymore. The reasons why a previously precious DDR set is not complete will be tackled later, but the voltage issues seem to be tied to Dram termination voltage. We can only speculate that VDIMM and termination in the IMC are linked directly. Meaning that there's no possible way you can increase voltage to the DIMMS without it affecting the signal or termination voltage. If this is indeed true, we can understand why 1.9 or 2.05Volts would not be a good idea, as the CPU would simply fail.

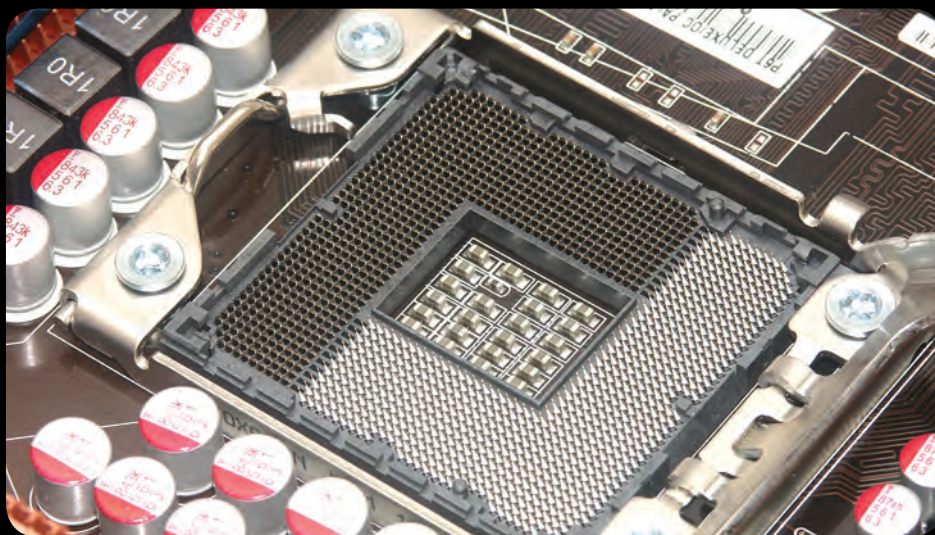
As for the reason why no current DDR3 set is complete, it's simply a matter of the Core i7 having a triple-channel memory controller, which obviously needs 3 or 6 DIMMS to be utilized in order for us to fully exploit the benefits of the IMC in the Core i7.

If all seems not well for Intel's new platform, you'll be happy to know that where it really counts, which is in the performance department, the Core i7 delivers. The memory bandwidth numbers, even in single channel mode at only 1,333MHz, rival those one would get on an LGA775 platform in dual channel mode, with RAM operating in excess of 1800MHz. This remains true in dual and in Triple-Channel mode. With three slots populated, we achieved an unprecedented 24GB/sec of memory bandwidth at some point, but with the RAM only operating at 1,200MHz CL6-6-6-18. In Dual Channel mode the results were equally impressive with 18GB/sec recorded. This kind of bandwidth is not only unheard of on the LGA775 platform, it is literally impossible to achieve.

That's not all however, because of architectural changes in the CPU itself, the Core i7 is notably faster than the outgoing Penryn core on a clock for clock basis, even if it were to have its memory controller in the MCH like the current LGA775 platform. Everything from the IMC, a wider execution core, new multimedia instruction sets, better branch prediction units, a Level 3 cache and Intel's Quick Path Interconnect technology, contribute into making it a highly impressive CPU. The Core i7 manages to be a CPU highly tuned for multi threaded applications, but still manages to outpace the Core 2 in single thread performance as well.

With Hyper-Threading back, the Core i7 series of CPUs, at least the quad cores, have 8 logical cores which allows the CPUs to simply walk all over the previous high end parts from the Core 2 family. This is where the Core i7 will shine the most, and from the 3DMark vantage CPU score results we saw, the Core i7 is ushering in a new level of performance better than we could have ever imagined. Despite the faults we may level at it, Intel has once again blown us away. The Intel Core i7 as it stands, is the future of PCs.

An in-depth performance review and comparison against the Core 2 Extreme X9770 will follow in the January issue of NAG. **NAG**



The mobile gaming revolution

Storming the desktop PC Bastille?

Russell Bennett looks at the growth of the notebook gaming market

MOBILE COMPUTING HAS RECENTLY passed the inflection point, with chip giant Intel Corp reporting that sales of mobile platforms and products have exceeded 50% market share of the overall consumer PC space for the first time ever. This shift has occurred due to the latest technology advancements enabling higher performance for lower power consumption and, perhaps more critically, at lower operating temperatures. While the shift in sales, and therefore economies of scale, has steadily eroded the value chasm which used to exist between a mobile and desktop platform of any given performance level.

And unsurprisingly, with this gearing-up of mobility as the solution of tomorrow, the comparatively new concept of the gaming notebook has been born, as well as numerous new solutions aimed specifically at improving gaming performance of mobile machines emerging to support and extend these machines to whole new heights. What we at NAG were musing, amidst this furore, was whether or not this mindset shift means trouble to the manufacturers of discrete graphics solutions?

RAISING THE LIMITS

Previously the idea of gaming on a notebook was laughable, for several reasons. Power, and not of the battery-life variety, but of the sheer stonk variety! Mobile CPUs were traditionally desktop parts scaled-down in power consumption and heat generation to suit the limitations of mobile packaging. While graphics solutions amounted to little more than entry-level integrated desktop GPUs, the traditionally poor performance of which is the very heart of the existence of the discrete graphics add-in card industry! But on a laptop, a sealed system, such components could previously not be scaled to the latest and greatest, which is a hardcore gamers bread and butter.

These limitations are changing now, from a variety of perspectives. Let's first look at the platform itself, and for this part of the discussion, Tiny Maubane of Intel SA had a lot to offer.

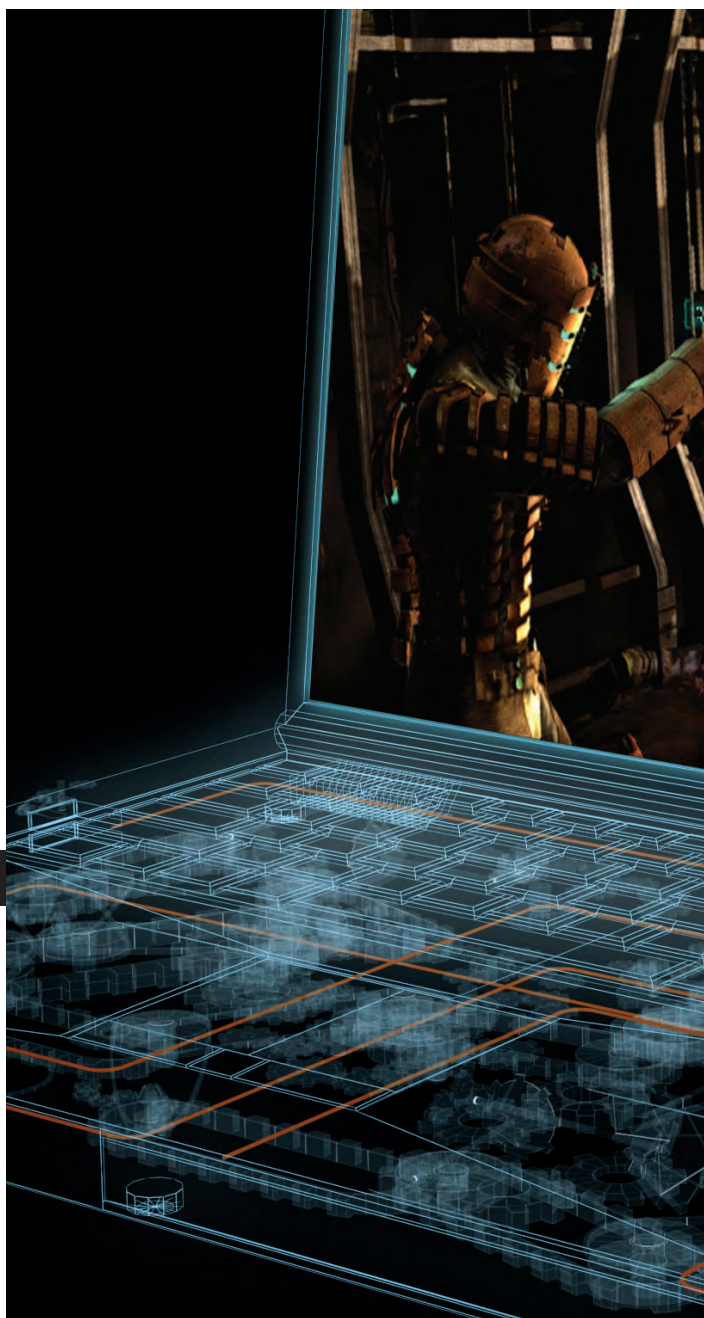
"With the launch of our Montevino platform last month, we have shown that a mobile design need not bow to computing performance limitations. Since the Core 2 architecture, and now even more so under the 45nm production process, Intel's mobile and desktop solutions are exactly the same, from a functionality and performance scalability point of view. You can, literally, now get a mobile platform which, computationally speaking, will go head to head with its desktop counterpart without a massively detrimental effect on battery life or thermal envelope."

This best of both worlds approach has been achieved through the efficiency gains of Intel's high-k 45nm manufacturing process, as well as increased intelligence within Intel mobile CPUs aimed at constantly optimising operational performance levels to conserve energy wherever possible. Incidentally, it's said the company's forthcoming Nehalem processor (recently branded the Core i7 series) takes this sliding scale between performance and power consumption to whole new levels of efficiency, from the stepped approach currently employed.

So, you do get equivalent CPU grunt for your mobile buck then, but what of the graphics inherently required to make a mobile gaming rig capable of tackling the latest generation of GPU-intensive gaming titles?

DRIVING KILLER MOBILE RENDERING PERFORMANCE

Well in this space, Intel's mid-range Larrabee GPU, and the GPU platform integration which will follow, is still some way off, while despite great strides recently in integrated graphics, these solutions remain unsuitable for anything but the most rudimentary gaming applications. Discrete graphics providers ATI, NVIDIA, and even S3, are pushing ever more powerful integrated mobile graphics solutions, with the latter most recently launching a ULP (Ultra-Low Power) version of its flagship GPU, the Chrome 400 series, with



an astonishing power requirement of just 7W despite claims of desktop-equivalent DirectX 10.1 capabilities. These solutions have driven the gaming notebook this far, and will continue to play an important role in the mainstream gaming segment in particular, but to capture the hard core of gamers, a more creative answer is needed.

Meanwhile on the other side of the great computing pond, AMD with its infamous acquisition of ATI some two years ago, has busily been developing what it believes might be just such an advanced solution to the traditional mobile performance conundrum.

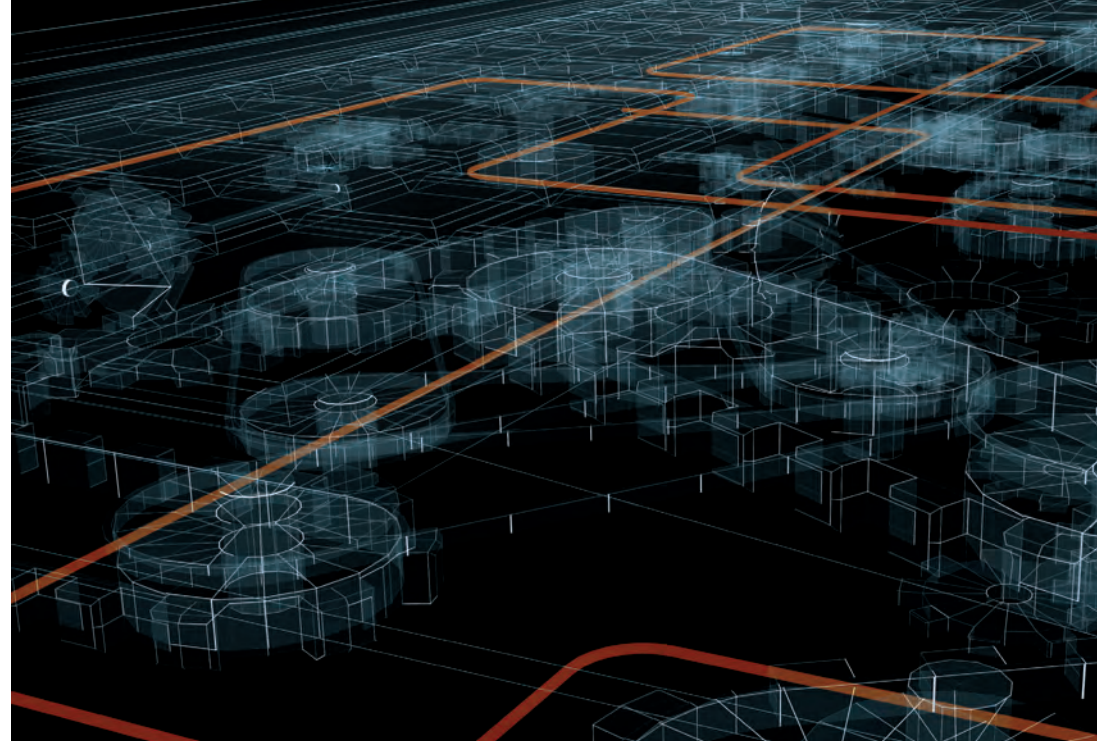
Recently the company made its Puma notebook platform available to consumers as well as technology partners across the globe, featuring a host of new features which make it specifically optimum for mobile gaming applications. Most pertinent is the fundamental shift in the graphics subsystem architecture, which in-line with the company's new Fusion marketing tagline, makes scaling notebook graphics a reality in the market today.

The Puma chipset which enables this scalability, AMD 780, gives technology partners in the ICT value chain the option of how to implement this graphics scalability. They can integrate high-end modern GPU solutions directly into the sealed notebook environment, with products very close to comparable with the latest desktop accelerators available both from ATI and NVIDIA camps, and even multi-GPU mobile applications now coming to the fore!

This model has been adopted by, for instance, ASUS with its incredible G70 gaming notebook range. This beast packs a pair of ATI 3850 accelerators running in Crossfire and backed by an enormous 2GB of RAM serving these monster graphics accelerators! What the 780 chipset enables in this solution is primarily advanced power switching techniques, by which these power-munching high-end GPUs are entirely disabled when the user isn't calling on their blazing 3D-rendering capabilities.

As incredible as this machine is, there are two limitations to its widespread adoption still. The first is size; it's a heavy beast as one would naturally expect of something so powerful, and the second is cost, the G70 weighing-in in the region of R45,000, the same as two similarly-specced desktop alternatives. Nevertheless, since going on sale in SA a month ago, the company has sold four G70s in the local market, so the elite gamer with deep pockets and strong shoulders is already biting. As our ASUS representative sums up; "The G70 is really a fantastic solution, but the pricing does make it a product with a tiny target market, and we believe that selling four in the local market in the first month is about what we can expect. It's like a Ferrari of computers, exclusive, immensely powerful, and affordable only by the elite. Certainly not as the death knell for high-end desktop gaming systems!"

Alternatively, integrators using the 780 chipset can offer scalability in graphics through external add-in accelerators, essentially traditional discrete video cards plugged-in either directly to the notebook through the new XGP add-in slot, essentially



an external interface of the PCI-Express bus, or through dedicated docking stations with capacity for 3D accelerators.

Adding an external GPU means that, while on the move, the user may not have full gaming power but does gain from a notebook which is lightweight with excellent battery life characteristics. Then, once at his static location and plugged-in either to an XGP box or accelerated docking station, all the rendering performance of a desktop is at their fingertips. A very smart solution, and in no way threatening to the traditional discrete GPU manufacturer – in fact a new opportunity to penetrate the burgeoning mobile space.

"Graphics scalability is without a doubt the primary distinguishing feature of Puma," comments Imi Mosaheb, country manager AMD SA. "It delivers ideally balanced mobility solutions incorporating high performance, good battery life, and a marginal cost delta to desktop alternatives. But still, the real enthusiast is going to find better value in the desktop, which is infinitely scalable, packs more processing punch and is entirely without physical limitations. Without a doubt, in terms of sheer scalability and bang for your buck, the desktop is and will remain king."

The Fusion ideology currently being adopted and driven by AMD does hold quite a lot of hitherto unimagined potential for mobile gaming of course, but what comes of it we'll just have to find out in due course. For now, all of the companies we approached supported this general opinion.

Rather than cannibalising the existing market, the move towards mobility, and the availability of gaming-capable mobile devices, is in essence catering to a new, elite gaming market. The gamer who must also have a portable solution, has substantial reserves of cash to buy-in to the high-end mobile gaming market, and isn't particularly interested in future outright scalability. He or she will likely simply upgrade to the next-greatest mobile gaming system when their needs demand it, period.

TRULY COMPETITION DRIVING INNOVATION

It is however interesting to note how the two biggest players here, AMD and Intel, appear to have separate elements of the final puzzle resolved. AMD has successfully addressed the challenge of scalability in mobile graphics solutions, while Intel has resolved the mobile processing limitations. Bringing these two camps together would, it appears, actually create the ideal current-generation mobile gaming system. But this level of collaboration is unlikely to materialise, with each camp dedicated to producing their own solutions rather than drive its direct competitor's market share.

Another manufacturer in a key position to gauge any downward trends in desktop platforms, is GIGABYTE. According to Tim Handley, Asia Sales Division Manager, this market is in better shape than ever despite the growth in mobility. He explains; "We're selling more discrete motherboards and VGA cards than ever before in the company history. We attribute this to the huge growth in PC DIY enthusiasts who learn how to build a PC at school or from their mates, and like to upgrade individual components

when there is an exciting new technology available [or they have some extra cash]. The infrastructure for upgrading notebook PCs is not commonplace yet, so notebook gamers are pretty much bound to their existing configuration until they buy a new system. The latest graphics intensive games are still the driving force in the PC gaming hardware industry; no game developer is really spending resources on developing new mid-range games for gaming notebooks. All the cutting edge high-definition software targets high-end components because those are the components that deliver the most immersive special effects."

He concludes; "Essentially we are preparing for the growth in mobility by focussing more on better quality and performance from Gigabyte's range of high-end motherboards and VGA cards, but we are still a long way from a high-end notebook PC outperforming a high-end desktop PC."

Maubane, then, concludes; "Gaming in the mobile space is actually gaining momentum at the moment. While hardcore enthusiasts do still love their big rigs and all the flexibility these encompass, more and more are looking at a mobile platform even if it's as an in-transit gaming solution alone. Of course we're talking the consumers with major spending power here. The multiple connectivity solutions integrated into the current generation of notebooks enhances the appeal as well, although in our market the application of this connectivity solution remains stunted by our local connectivity obstacles."

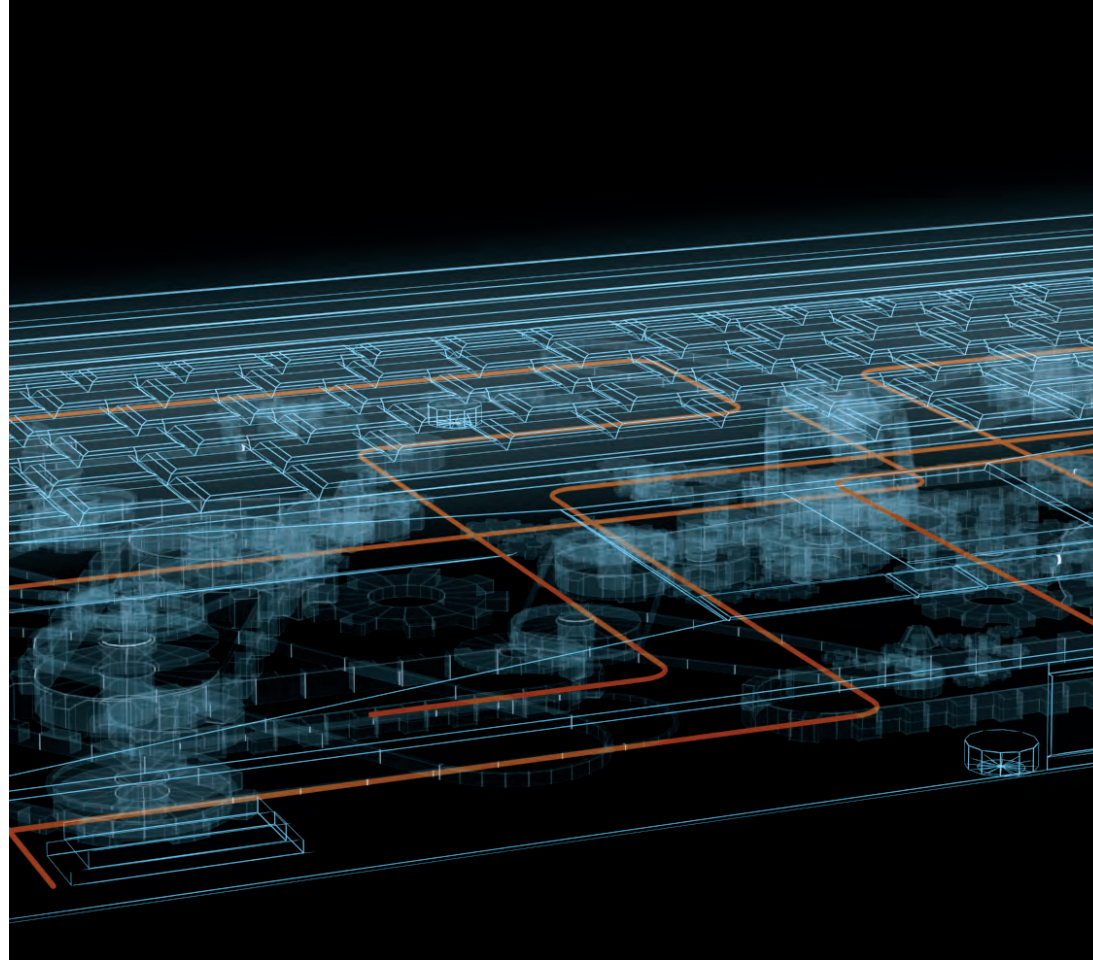
And AMD SA's Mosaheb; "We are ideally positioned, as players in the platform, CPU,

and GPU markets, to witness the shift in customer desires happening at the moment. That is to say, we're noticing that while the market used to be CPU-performance driven, it is now more visual-oriented – customers are more prepared to pay for a high-performance display solution than the fastest processing power. But either way, the desktop will remain at the forefront of outright computing power for the conceivable future, despite the strong growth in the mobile space right now."

THE PC RETAINS TOP DOG STATUS!

From these industry expert's comments it's pretty clear that gaming on a conventional PC which can stack fans or more aggressive cooling methods to run at the maximum possibly operating frequencies, with as many beefy GPUs as the system, and the gamers wallet, can handle and draw liberal dollops of power from the local electrical grid remains the ideal, mainstream answer today. Gaming notebooks are incredible, and packing more and more power by the day with clever technologies appearing to further boost this capability from all sides, but despite this strong focus remain an entirely separate niche. Limited primarily by packaging restrictions and the high costs of high-end mobile gaming components, the PC is still the hardcore gamer's weapon of choice.

But of course, you can't play CoD4 while waiting for your plane to arrive at a long stopover in an international airport. So for the truly committed gamer who travels around a lot, a mobile monster like the G70 and its ilk would certainly be a "nice to have", given deep enough pockets. **NAG**



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Innovative, patented and curved heatpipe design for a heat transfer capacity of up to four heatpipes with the use of just two.



The GIGABYTE Open Overclocking Championship 08

Neo Sibeko accompanies the SA team to Taiwan to battle it out for overclocking glory against twenty two other countries

SEPTEMBER SAW POSSIBLY THE best Overclocking gathering the world has ever seen. While this is not the first year GIGABYTE has hosted an international event, it was the first time that there were more than twenty countries represented; amongst the new invitees were South Africa's Team Ghetto. This is the same team that represented South Africa in a previous International competition in July.

GIGABYTE, always looking to one-up the competition, went all out for both contestants and media present at the three day event. From providing accommodation at the five star Grand Hyatt Hotel in the heart of Taipei City, right next to one of the tallest buildings in the world, 101, to providing some of their most exclusive components the company has to offer.

The invitee list featured almost everybody in the Top 100 list of overclockers in the world. With over \$10,000 in prize money up for grabs, one would have expected a lot of tension between the contestants, but nothing could be further from the truth. Many of the competitors had attended previous events prior to GOOC, and it seemed more like a reunion than a competition.

On the first day of the event GIGABYTE took some time to introduce everybody

to their new Ultra Durable 3 line of motherboards. These motherboards had not been shown anywhere else, and this was their unofficial premier to the enthusiast crowd. Besides the usual improvements made on motherboard generations where component quality improves, with Ultra Durable 3, GIGABYTE pioneered another first by featuring 2.0oz copper on their motherboards for all interconnects and traces. This doubling of the copper inner layer supposedly improves power efficiency by lowering impedance by up to 50%. The Ultra Durable 3 motherboards also feature a hardware overvoltage control chip, which allows very fine voltage control and real time control of the various voltages on the motherboard. Whether any of what was presented to the media and contestants will make a tangible difference to the enthusiast and gaming community remains to be seen. However, what is true is that the EP45-UD3R (reviewed in this issue) is the only motherboard currently available that is capable of completing 3D benchmarks at 670MHz. When the DDR3 version is made available (and possibly extreme model), it may be the new favourite amongst enthusiasts still on the LGA775 platform.

GIGABYTE also took the opportunity to



Winners of the main GOOC event. HiCookie on the far right had been up for almost 72 hours by then, having tested every single CPU to make sure they all had around the same limits to even out the playing field



NightRaven from Singapore, early on while the contestants were still filled with energy. Several hours later the smiles had disappeared

show off their upcoming EX58-Extreme LGA1366 for the Core i7 series of CPUs. While a limited number of people got a hands-on with the demo unit that was there, not much was said about the motherboard, other than that it will feature some of the enhancements found in the Ultra Durable 3 range.

With everyone impressed about the new boards, the real excitement was reserved for the following day, which would see the contestants go through 2,000 liters of liquid nitrogen in a single afternoon. Contestants were provided with a GIGABYTE EP45T-Extreme motherboard, (former Dream machine motherboard), GIGABYTE Odin 1200Watt PSU, Intel Core 2 Extreme X9650 CPU, Corsair Dominator DDR3 memory,

Western Digital SATA 300 Hard Drives and Viewsonic LCD monitors. There would be several benchmark disciplines, including Everest memory bandwidth benchmark, Super PI Mod 1.5XS, 3DMark06 and 3DMark 2001SE.

Contestants were given a limited amount of time for each benchmark, after which results would be tallied and the overall winner would walk away with \$5,000. Second place would receive \$2,000 and third place \$1,000. The winners were Team Sweden (SF3D who is actually from Finland and Elmor) who claimed first prize, second was Team Russia (Dedal and NeoForce) and in third place the primary USA Team. After the formal competition, there was a Freestyle session, which would further

reward any contestant who broke the most world records on that day.

These records would be verified against HWBOT which hosts all the world and hardware records. There was a little confusion when it came to this section of the competition, as many contestants were not aware of how the record breaking would work, seeing as there was a world record for just about every single piece of imaginable hardware available on the day.

However, this was a minor issue, and the primary American team featuring XtremeSystem's owner Fugger and his apprentice Vapor, who used several solid state drives, claimed PCMark records, as these benchmarks lean primarily on the speed of the host drives.

Contestants were given a limited amount of time for each benchmark, after which results would be tallied and the overall winner would walk away with \$5,000.



Media desk with really high speed internet (No it's not 4Mbps think 10Mbps and more)



After hours of overclocking, the energy levels were low and the smiles were no more, especially when things are not going according to plan



GIGABYTE EX58-Extreme with an early Core i7 920 CPU, built into the IKONIK RA-X10



Eye candy – more of what we love!



Wall of fame which has all the contestants from all the various countries



Because I'm worth it!

After the overclocking the Tavern did a great job at picking up everybody's spirits



Trax from South Africa preparing the 4870 cards



GIGABYTE also took the opportunity to show off their upcoming EX58-Extreme LGA1366 for the Core i7 series of CPUs.





One special corner at Gigabyte's Plant

It was a long day for all at the event and, despite an endless supply of Redbull, fatigue set in and many of the teams did not submit scores at all due to issues related to various problems. Our own local team did not manage to submit any score and unfortunately placed last, along with several other teams who had issues with the 4870 graphics cards. The graphics cards were throttling and some refusing to post because the VGA bios would get a fan failed signal and shut down. This took so much time to figure out, that a large number of teams lost time trying to deal with this issue.

With that however, was the greatest display of camaraderie, where a Team member such as Zolkorn from Thailand was helping out other team members to resolve issues during the formal competition. Despite the fact that he, and others who were willing to help were losing time, they went ahead and helped others get their machines up and running. In a way showing what GOCC was actually about, which is a gathering of the world's best overclockers pushing GIGABYTE hardware to the limits, rather than an event to prove whose is the best overclocker.

Besides organizing the competition itself, GIGABYTE organized the famous Taipei

City Tour for all the people attending the event, also showing us the inner workings of one of their assembly plants. No other manufacturer allows this, so we were more than privileged to get an inside look into one of the most impressive assembly plants in existence today.

The highlight of the factory tour was easily the best testing machines, as GIGABYTE tests every single motherboard that is sold prior to it being packaged. So any defects that arise from a motherboard or VGA card by the time it gets to the end user are likely introduced during handling outside of the GIGABYTE factory.

Overall, the GOCC was without a doubt the best overclocking event ever held. There was not a single complaint from any of the contestants about the actual event, which is very rare considering that enthusiasts range from the abnormally passive to the most easily excitable people.

All thanks go to GIGABYTE staff, especially to Tim Handley from GIGABYTE, who is one of the most passionate people when it comes to the enthusiast market. We would also like to extend our thanks to Rectron South Africa who helped organize the pre-qualifying round here in South Africa. **NAG**

F.R.A.G.

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Durban :: 12-14 December '08

rAge 2008 Overclocking

The Intel Extreme Technology stand at rAge 2008 proved to be the most successful overclocking showcase the country has ever seen. Not only did the event see the smashing of several 3DMark records, it also helped promote extreme overclocking more than any other single event. **Neo Sibeko reports back.**

ONE THING CAME OUT of the entire event, and that is, to the average attendee, overclocking is still considered pushing a CPU to its maximum clock speed and that's it. While it is most certainly part of it, it's actually less than 50% of it, given that all records were broken with a CPU running at only 5.4GHz. Hardly an impressive clock speed by any measure, but the fact that it was a Quad core, and the motherboard frequency was at 450MHz, at some point makes it significant.

Hardware for the event was provided by Intel (CPUs), and GIGABYTE, who supplied everything from power supplies to VGA cards. Without a doubt, the star of the show was the GA-X48T-DQ6 which, while perhaps long in the tooth, is amongst the best X48 based motherboards at overclocking quad core CPUs. Even though DDR3 1800MHz CL7 capable RAM was provided, there was no time to tweak the system and get the best out of the RAM/FSB and CPU configuration, so in a way, the runs were suboptimal, but they were good enough to smash the previous records quiet substantially.

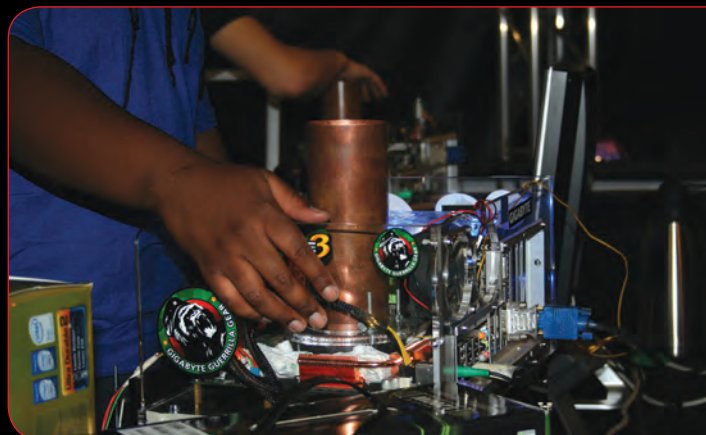
Overclocking at any public event is always harder than overclocking in private and this was very evident at several different times. Random issues would creep up causing instability and at least twice, a re-mount was needed to bring the system to its optimal performance again. With the presence of lights, massive crowds and a workable but relatively small area, temperatures were higher than they would normally be on the VGA cards, and that meant not clocking as high on the cards, which obviously affected results.

However, given all of that, the previous record for 3DMark06, which

was nowhere near impressive when compared to what is on HWBOT, was broken quiet convincingly on Saturday and Sunday. By the end of the day on Saturday the new score was 30,789, which while impressive, was still not in the Top 20 worldwide. On Sunday, with some clock frequency increases and tighter RAM timings, the score jumped to 31,946, which made it 14th worldwide. Not only was this the highest position for 3DMark06 ever for any South African, but this score, along with the 7th position gained in 3DMark Vantage with a score of P25337, saw our first Overclocking Guru, an award handed to the top 100 Overclockers in the world. Out of the three main benchmarks run throughout the weekend, each record was broken twice, for a total of six records for the entire weekend.

Thinking that 150 litres of Liquid Nitrogen would have been enough to last the whole weekend, the big rig operated by expert overclockers seth and Trax was going through nitrogen at almost four times the rate compared to the other rig. However that still didn't stop the pair from putting out some impressive scores, managing the 6th highest 3DMark06 score in the world with a Dual Core CPU, an impressive feat under any circumstance.

Overall, a very successful weekend, if not the most successful one ever when it comes to overclocking gatherings locally. A big thank you should go out to all the local enthusiasts who came out to the stand, greeted everybody and brought life to the stand, Gary from Intel South Africa, Tim from GIGABYTE HQ (who flew in from Taipei), Tony from Rectron, NAG for providing the opportunity, the event organizers, and as always, everybody who came out to rAge this year. **NAG**



ASUS EAH4870 TOP

109% Speeds!

World's First Factory O.C. HD4870 for Astounding Visuals!



Graphic buffs that have been clamoring for more speed can now put their hands on the new ASUS EAH4870 TOP/HTDI/512M graphics card. This powerful graphics card utilizes the ATI Radeon™ HD 4870 GPU for outstanding 109% GPU speeds; and provides support for DirectX 10.1 special effects for the ultimate gaming visuals.

109% GPU Performances

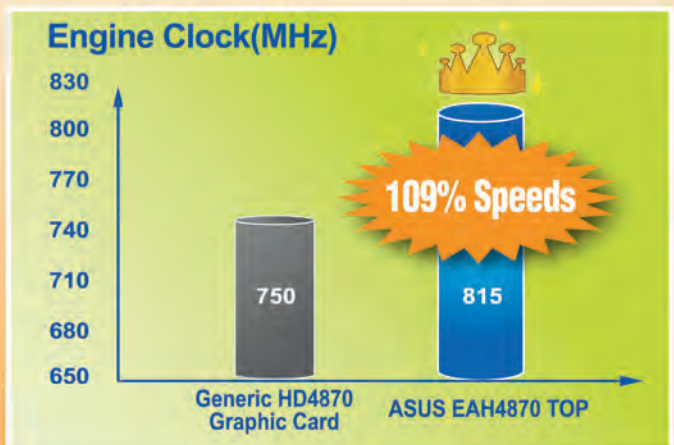
As the world's first overclocking version for the EAH4870 Series, the EAH4870 TOP/HTDI/512M lets you experience GPU and memory clock performance boosts from 750MHz up to 815MHz and 3.6GHz up to 3.7GHz respectively. This generates an astounding 3DMark Vantage Extreme Preset score of 3733 - providing you an astonishing 109% GPU performance for that extra graphical "oomph". With such sheer gaming performance, you can now experience much more for all your gaming needs - only with the ASUS EAH4870 TOP/HTDI/512M.

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The ASUS EAH4870 TOP brings about the power of graphical "supercomputing" to gamers - setting new standards for visual computing. Equipped with the new TeraScale graphics engine, fully immersive and cinematic gaming experiences will re-define how you play your games and take HD gaming to a brand new



level. This not just applies to gaming though, as the ASUS EAH4870 TOP will allow you to watch Blu-ray movies and play HD content with incredible visual fidelity and breakthrough efficiency - all without compromising performance.



▲ ASUS EAH4870 TOP Provides Enhanced GPU Performances



MSI MEGABOOK GX720

MOBILE COMPUTING HAS BEEN on the increase of late, with gaming laptops becoming a more regular feature at LAN events. And why not? With advancements in technology, laptops now sport hardware capable of running the latest games, Gigabit Ethernet for lag-free multiplayer sessions, hard drive space in excess of 250GB, and a host of other features that make them preferable over current gaming machines. After all, a 3.5kg laptop is far easier to carry around than a 24kg full tower case, which takes up the majority of a desk before the screen even comes into play. Imagine arriving at a LAN with nothing more than a laptop bag, not having to worry about many cables, or space issues. It's better than it sounds, and as is, it sounds great. For review, we have the MSI MEGABOOK GX720, MSI's high-end model in its MEGABOOK range, coming with all the bells and whistles one would expect from a laptop costing this much.

PERFORMANCE

Performance is one of the MEGABOOK's strong points, as it sports some of the greatest hardware mobile computing has to offer, and then goes the extra mile to improve on it. With an Intel Centrino 2 P9500 running at 2.53GHz, "well-endowed" just got a completely new meaning. Based on the

45nm architecture used by newer Wolfdale CPUs, the MSI MEGABOOK benefits from low heat output due to the reduced power consumption of the Centrino 2 processors, as well as amazing performance, attributed to their 6MB L2 cache. This performance would be useless without a decent chipset and RAM, though, so luckily the MEGABOOK makes use of the P45M chipset, which runs cooler, faster, and more efficient than its predecessors, making it the smart choice for mobile computing. But perhaps the most impressive aspect is the RAM completing this performance trio. Running stock at 800MHz with timings of 5-5-5-15, the RAM is faster than the standard 667MHz modules you find in laptops today. More on how this RAM really shines later on though. A slight disappointment comes into play when it becomes apparent that the graphics are powered by the GeForce 9600M GT, which is a capable card. However, when one considers that other companies have used 8700M GTs and even 8800GTXs in SLI for gaming, it seems underpowered. When you factor in that the 17-inch screen can support resolutions of up to 1,680 x 1,050, it seems as if MSI went all out to create a performance beast of note, but as an afterthought decided to throw in a mid-range graphics card - because they could. Disappointing, but

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forgivable. Onto stock numbers, where the MEGABOOK sets the bar. Using Everest benchmarking software, we were able to record a memory read score of 6,025MB/sec, decimating any laptop using 667MHz RAM, allowing the system enough bandwidth to feel more responsive, and easier to use. Where the system really started to shine, though, was when Everest's CPU Queen test put the P9500 running at 2.53GHz on par with an AMD 6000+ running at 3GHz, showing the power of this laptop's CPU to be equal to that of a very common gaming CPU in today's tech world. These results were further confirmed when the FPU Julia test gave us a score of 5,295, quite close to that of a quad-core Phenom 9500. Once into the 3D test, however, the MEGABOOK disappointed slightly. While it has more than enough grunt to run *Assassin's Creed* on a mixture of medium and high at 1,680 x 1,050 - a commendable feat - benchmark scores were a letdown. Because we couldn't utilise any of Futuremark's benchmarking apps to test the MEGABOOK because of a software problem, we were limited to using AquaMark. Scoring 207,540, the result was decent, but when compared to an 8700GT or an 8800GTX that some laptops boast, it just doesn't cut it. Often the cause of low AquaMark scores stems from the CPU



limiting the graphics card, but as later tests will show, this is not the case, as the score increased minimally when overclocked. Yes, you heard right, overclocked...

Possibly the greatest feature of the MEGABOOK, its proverbial ace up the sleeve, would be the once-touch overclocking, which turns this gaming notebook into a laptop performance king. A touch-sensitive key above the keyboard increases the FSB from 266MHz to 309MHz over a five-second period, increasing system performance all round. With this FSB jump, the CPU speed increased to 2.94GHz and the RAM speed to 930MHz – showing a 16% overclock at the touch of a button. While the 390MHz increase on the CPU is commendable rather than astonishing for a 45nm-based Intel CPU, the increase on the RAM is just unbelievable. For standard modules with no relaxing of timings or sub-timing, nor an increase in voltage, the extra 130MHz makes a world of difference and then some. At this overclock, memory bandwidth increased to 6,995MB/sec, topping a X6800 CPU using much faster DDR2 1,066MHz RAM with 5-5-5-15 timings. The reason for this is not only the more advanced architecture of the P9500, but also the sub-timings of the overclocked RAM. These manage to stay low despite the overclock, much lower than generic DDR2 modules found in most PCs nowadays, giving them an edge when it comes to performance. The CPU Queen test provided a result of just over 13,000, which is close to an Intel E8400's score of 13,452, albeit on a lower-end motherboard with cheaper RAM. FPU Julia showed a minimal improvement with a score of 5,761, closing in once again on an Intel E8400. With results this close to Intel's 3GHz 45nm processor, Super PI was run for the novelty factor, and gave us a time of 16.177 seconds in the 1M test. Faster than any previous-generation Intel CPU (not to mention all AMD CPUs), Super PI highlighted the performance of the 6MB L2 cache, making this MEGABOOK great at

single- and multi-threaded tasks. Moving onto 3D numbers then. With AquaMark once again being the only test able to run on the MEGABOOK, the score of 209,452 was the only indication of a performance increase. While there was some increase, it was low enough to indicate that the CPU wasn't the bottleneck in the system. Interestingly, the frame rates of modern gaming engines increased far more than the AquaMark score did, showing that if more modern benchmarks had been available, the increase resulting from the overclocking would be much higher.

The last performance factor worth mentioning is one often neglected: heat. Laptops generally run at very high temperatures, often becoming uncomfortable after hours of use on a lap. After all the benchmarking was completed, the MEGABOOK was cool to the touch. The CPU is worthy of mention here, with idle temperatures of 43 degrees and 58 degrees under load. Even when overclocked, temperatures were 48 degrees and 67 degrees respectively, which for a near 3GHz laptop CPU is very cool indeed. With temperatures like these, you can rest assured knowing that your components will have a long life even when used regularly.

OTHER FEATURES

What would a gaming laptop be without features to go with awesome performance? Simply put, it wouldn't. Which is why it's a relief to know that the only rival to the MEGABOOK's performance is its features. The first of the MEGABOOK's many features would be the touch-sensitive panel mentioned earlier. Turbo mode and Bluetooth buttons are located on a stylish and functional surface. More for style than anything else, the touch panel excels at making the GX720 that much more appealing visually, and can possibly be the deciding factor between two evenly matched laptops. The next impressive

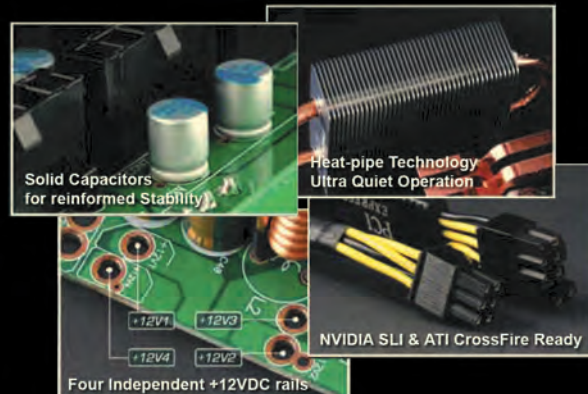
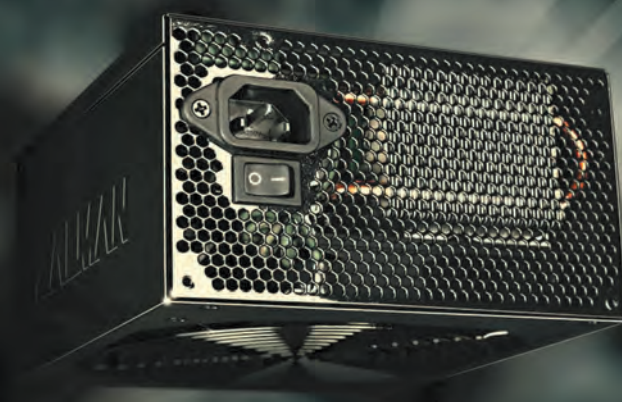
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feature of the MEGABOOK is ECO mode. Utilising MSI's ECO engine, the GX720 can switch between five different modes: Gaming mode, Movie mode, Presentation mode, Office mode, and Turbo Battery mode. Changing modes is as simple as pressing the ECO touch-sensitive button, and can drastically improve performance for the various tasks expected of the MEGABOOK. The modes work by focusing on specific components that would be of use, such as the audio for movie mode, and can enhance the experience more than one would think. While on the subject of audio, the GX720 makes use of two midrange and two subwoofer speakers to create a stunning audio experience. You read right, subwoofers. In a laptop. Pointless? Well, not really. While they will never match a dedicated home theatre subwoofer, those used in the GX720 are good enough to make a noticeable difference when compared to normal laptop speakers, creating a

more realistic audio experience. If this is not your cup of tea, however, the GX720 is equipped with four audio ports: Mic in, Line in, Line out, and Headphone out. These are functional, and make using the GX720 with headphones or even a dedicated speaker system a possibility. All this points towards not only a gaming laptop, but a multimedia powerhouse too. With a 17-inch widescreen LCD, games, movies, and any other form of entertainment are more than adequately represented, and what's more, GX720 makes use of VIVID technology, which supposedly improves colour representation. Compared to a standard laptop, the difference is visible, making VIVID technology worth of a mention. With attention to the audio and video output, MSI has put the GX720 in a league of its own, putting to shame not only normal laptops, but also its high-end competition. Other features like e-SATA, a built in Webcam, HDMI out, a Blue-ray drive, and full numeric

SPECS

PROCESSOR	Intel Centrino 2 P9500
CHIPSET	Intel PM45 + ICH9M
MEMORY	2GB DDR2 800MHz
SCREEN	17-inch WXGA ACV
GRAPHICS	NVIDIA GeForce 9600M GT (512MB GDDR3)
AUDIO	HD audio, 4 speakers + 1 subwoofer
HDD	320GB SATA (5,400rpm)
DIMENSIONS	395mm x 278mm x 26.5-35mm
WEIGHT	3.2kg

SCORE



keypad show that MSI has not skimped on features in any respect, and the GX720 feels complete, lacking nothing of importance.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Overall, the MSI MEGABOOK GX720 has its good points and its bad ones. Like every good piece of hardware, the only thing left is to decide if it's worth its hefty price tag. On the plus side, it looks great, performs phenomenally well, is designed for mobile media and gaming, comes bundled with loads of extras, and offers you everything a normal desktop PC would. The other end of the coin shows that it is very bulky, the battery life suffers due to its performance, and of course, you end up hating anyone who is lucky enough to own one. As gaming laptops go, the MSI MEGABOOK 720GX ranks highly in all areas; and if you can afford it, it will provide you with joy to no end. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

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Configuration buttons located on the side reduce clutter on the face of the monitor

SAMSUNG SYNCMASTER T260 LCD

IT NEVER CEASES TO amaze just how the price of LCD monitors continues to fall, while display sizes keep increasing. A few years ago, a 26-inch LCD was out of reach for many gamers. Not only that, but the quality left a lot to be desired and the response times were less than adequate for the most part.

Fast-forward to 2008, and one can pick up an HD LCD monitor, such as the Samsung T260 we have here, at a very good price. Not only is the monitor affordable, but it is among the best 26-inch units you will find on the market. In our opinion, it's the best 26-inch LCD available locally, which isn't surprising as Samsung is among the major substrate manufacturers; and logic would dictate that they know best how to calibrate their monitors to work best with their substrates.

To that end, Samsung has done a stellar job with the T260. It offers 25.5 inches of actual viewable screen space, has a native resolution of 1,920 x 1,200 (16:10) - as one would expect - and has an impressive 5ms response time (grey-to-grey). The monitor features an HDMI and DVI input like all LCD monitors of this size. It also has the standard VGA input for older sources and has USB connectors built in at the rear of the monitor. They are most certainly not located in a user-friendly position, but with USB extension leads, they could be useful for keyboards and other peripherals. The monitor boasts full HD 1080p, which is

great; but without HDCP support, some encrypted high-definition content will be 'un-watchable' - at least not in 1080 format. This is the only fault we could find with the monitor from a technical point of view.

Other than the HDCP issue, the monitor is virtually flawless. The 'dynamic' contrast rate of 20,000:1 may be more academic than anything else, but one thing is certain: the image is quite incredible. Working with a monitor of this size, one is usually impressed by the sheer size of the screen area, but this is not the case with the T260. It truly produces an incredible image, which looks impressive if you're watching a DVD or playing an FPS. It is nothing short of amazing and puts to shame just about any other monitor of this size. Gaming at non-native resolutions is as one would expect not a good idea, but should one be forced to lower the resolution in any game to maintain a playable frame rate, the image is still sharp and very easy to get used to.

Aesthetically, the monitor is flawless: the power button is touch sensitive, so you merely touch it and the monitor is turned on or off. Configuration buttons are located on the right side of the monitor away from view to give the T260 a very clean fascia. The gloss black finish works very well and makes the T260 look elegant and appropriate in almost any environment it is placed in.

In terms of LCD monitors, the T260 is right up there with the best of them. For

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twice the price, you won't get a better monitor in terms of quality, and this is true for the smaller models in the range as well (right down to the 22-inch model). If you are thinking about getting a 24-inch model, you may want to consider the T260 instead. It has the same native resolution, but the larger size will allow you to sit farther from the monitor.

The Samsung T260 is simply the best LCD we have ever had the pleasure of working with. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

SIZE	25.5"
ASPECT RATIO	16:10
HDCP SUPPORT	No
INPUTS	VGA, DVI, HDMI
RESPONSE TIME	5ms (GTG)
CONTRAST RATIO	20,000:1
AUDIO OUTPUT	Optical + Analogue stereo output

SCORE





T190, T200, T220,
T240, T260

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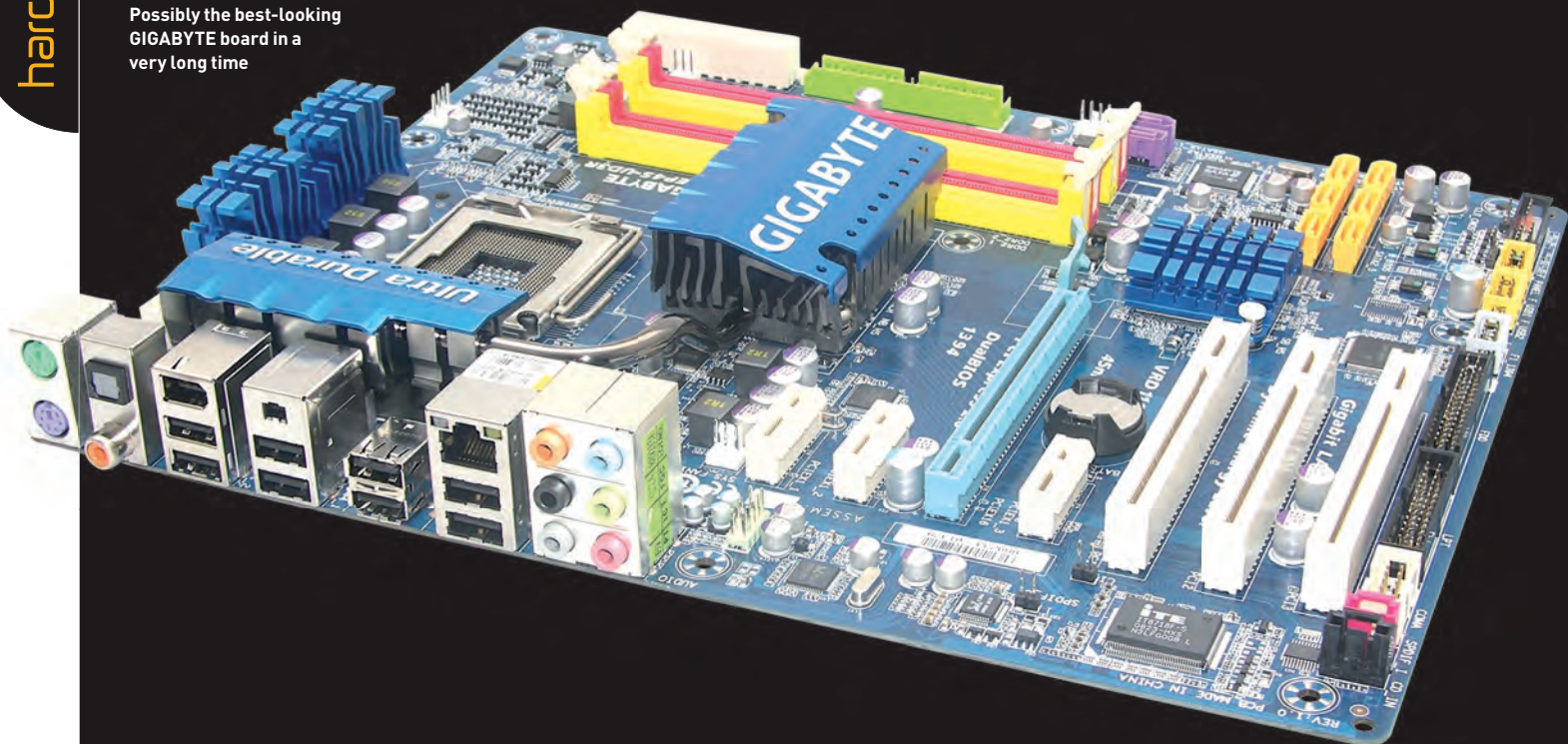
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GIGABYTE GA-EP45-UD3R

IN THE EVOLUTION OF motherboard design, at least where GIGABYTE is concerned, there have been many firsts by the company. They were the first to use solid capacitors, low-ferrite chokes and a dual-BIOS system, which is now commonplace in many high-end, enthusiast-class motherboards from many manufacturers.

Not willing to let the rest of the industry catch up, GIGABYTE recently introduced their latest innovation in the Ultra Durable 3 design, which is mainly what the EP45-UD3R is about. As it is newer than the EP45T-Extreme we reviewed several months ago, this motherboard features a 2.0oz copper layer instead of the 1oz on the Extreme board. Many may wonder why this is a big deal or if it even matters at all, and the truth is that it makes all the difference to the enthusiasts, but not so much to the gamer and general user.

The extra copper layer not only helps dissipate heat (up to 50% lower temperatures according to marketing documentation), but allows for better signalling due to lower electron impedance. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen, but currently the EP45-UD3R board is the only motherboard that has successfully completed 3D benchmarks at an FSB above 650MHz. While our own overclocking did not reach those levels because of the DDR limitations we had, we did manage to run at 600MHz, which so happens to be where the EP45T-Extreme motherboard was limited to on air-cooling as well.

As far as the BIOS goes, the UD3R is what you would expect from any modern GIGABYTE motherboard. Gone is the

Ctrl+F1 key combination to unlock advanced overclocking features. Not all tweaking options are available directly without any hidden menus. Despite the BIOS being an equal match to that of the Extreme series, it is worth keeping in mind that this board is far more affordable, so with that a few sacrifices have been made.

The most obvious difference is in the power regulation circuitry, which doesn't feature GIGABYTE's 12-phase design, but a leaner 6-phase system. In all our testing, we have found that the additional power phases rarely make a difference, as other parts of the motherboards fail before power phases come into play.

As with other "R" type motherboards from GIGABYTE, this particular model only features a single PCI Express 16x slot. Therefore, CrossFire is not available, but the rest of the motherboard estate is used up by three PCI Express 1x slots and three traditional PCI 2.2 slots. Because of the motherboard not supporting multiple GPUs, SATA placement is perfect, allowing all eight ports to be used without hindrance.

The motherboard uses the same ALC889A audio controller chip that is on the DQ6 range of motherboards, so it inherits DTS support, optical-in and -out and 7.1-channel surround sound. Eight USB 2.0 ports at the rear make it great for connectivity, and it is amazing that at this price range GIGABYTE has managed to keep features usually reserved for the more expensive boards in their range.

Aesthetically, the board looks great. Gone are the copper heat sinks that dominated the

previous-generation boards - in their place are metallic blue heat sinks. The PWM and Northbridge are connected via a striking chrome-black heat pipe. If the extreme series in future takes anything from this board, it should be the colour scheme, as it is possibly the best GIGABYTE has had. If you're not particularly interested in CrossFire functionality on the P45 chipset, the EP45-UD3R may be the board you are looking for. It features most of what you would find in the Extreme P45 boards, but it costs significantly less. For a gaming rig or even the enthusiast who's on a budget but doesn't want to lose out on performance, this is the motherboard to purchase.

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Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P45 + ICH10R
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR3 184-pin [Max. 4 x 2GB]
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2/Core 2 Duo/Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	1 x PCI-E 16x, 3 x PCI-E 1x, 3 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	8 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 8 x USB 2.0, 1 x Gigabit Ethernet, 2 x FireWire

SCORE



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ACER PREDATOR TROOPER II

THE ACER PREDATOR RANGE is a line of desktop gaming PCs that aims to take away the drama of custom builds by giving end-users a powerful machine in a neat, good-looking package. Spanning the price gamut from a handsome R28,000 for the entry-level Sniper II to a pretty much ridiculous R60,000 for the range-topping Eliminator II, they all share a few common components, such as the chassis, water-cooling system, motherboard and accessories like Blu-ray support and Logitech input devices.

The major concern buyers will likely have with a machine like this is, "Does it perform well?" Unfortunately, in the series of tests we ran, the PC underwhelmed us at almost every opportunity. Synthetic tests saw the Trooper II consistently come in below our expected scores, managing to nab scores of 12,899 in 3DMark Vantage, 14,912 in 3DMark 06 and only 59,685 in 3DMark 03. Simple brute-force CPU tests, like Super PI, proved to be fair on the system, resulting in 16-second runs at the quad core's stock speed of 2.83GHz. For in-game tests, the Trooper II soldiered on through our *CoD4* tests, managing to maintain a cool 50-60 frames per second at maximum settings, only occasionally dropping below that mark. *World in Conflict* showed decent results, providing us with an average frame rate of 35fps at its 'very high' setting and a min./max. of 9/83. *Crysis*, however, proved to be too much for the hardware: we could only get consistently playable frame rates (30+) at mixed medium-to-high settings (mostly medium, or 'mainstream') – the 'enthusiast' setting 'laughed' the Predator down to a

pitiful 10fps during even the most sedate periods of gameplay.

Looking at the Predator's built-in, 'maintenance-free' water-cooling system and heat pipe-laden motherboard, you'd expect it to be a beast of an overclocker. Unfortunately, between the generic RAM, unhelpful CMOS and dreadful cooling system, overclocking is not something you'll be playing with too much with the Predator. Of the six fans in the case, there are no induction fans to bring in cool air, and all extraction fans move air through a component to exhaust it. Even the primary extraction mounting, the typical 120mm fan slot to the side of the rear IO ports, is occupied by the diminutive water-cooling radiator. This forces hot, ambient air to pass through the water-cooling system before it's allowed to leave. All of this adds up to a rather unimpressive 50 degrees idle temperature on the CPU, and a concerning upper-60s during load – simply unacceptable for a water-cooling system looking after components running at stock speeds. The situation only gets worse as one pushes the clock speeds higher, yielding temperatures in the 70s when the CPU is put under pressure at anything over 3GHz. I can't help but feel that a high-end air-cooling system combined with a couple of case fans for air circulation would give the CPU and graphics cards their wings and unlock their overclocking potential.

While the Acer Predator isn't a terrible machine (far from it, in truth), it simply doesn't match up to similarly priced setups, let alone those half its price. Sure, it looks really cool, and comes with a few neat tricks like Blu-ray support and a high-speed HDD,

but the fact is that much more powerful systems can be assembled, with better quality components, for considerably less. The Acer Predator, for all its potential, boils down to an over-priced system in an expensive, deceptively average chassis with bolt-on armour and a handful of shiny stickers. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

SPECS

OS	Microsoft Windows Vista Home Premium 64-bit
CPU	Core 2 Quad Q9550 @ 2.83GHz (water-cooled)
MOTHERBOARD	Custom MSI 780i SLI
RAM	4 x 2GB 800MHz generic DDR2 @ 5-5-5-18
GRAPHICS CARDS	2 x 9800GTX 512MB
HDD	1 x 150GB WD 10K RPM, 2 x 640GB WD
OPTICAL	1 x DVD-RW, 1 x BD-ROM
INPUT	Logitech G11, Logitech G5 SE

SCORE



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SAPPHIRE HD 4870 TOXIC (CROSSFIRE)

IT'S BEEN SEVERAL MONTHS since AMD/ATI changed the face of discreet graphics cards by introducing the HD 4800 series of VGA adapters. Now that the hype has died down and almost everyone who cares about high-end graphics performance is familiar with the parts, it's time for manufacturers to set themselves apart by more than just stickers on a reference graphics card.

To this extent, SAPPHIRE has chosen to give their 4870 graphics cards a second outing under the TOXIC brand, which has traditionally been their high-end overclocked series featuring everything from custom water-cooling solutions, overclocked settings or a combination of the two. The TOXIC range can be likened to ASUSTeK's TOP line or Gainward's Golden Sample range. The TOXIC range, however, has always been a little more adventurous than the other brands' speciality ranges.

With the HD 4870 TOXIC, this is no different. The 4870 TOXIC is not water-cooled, but it features a custom cooling solution dubbed "VAPOR-X," which makes use of vapour chamber technology inside the heat pipes to manage temperatures better than normal heat pipes are able to. This custom cooling solution not only results in a lighter card than the reference models, but the temperatures are improved as well. With the cooling part taken care of, SAPPHIRE decided to overclock the graphics card to a core speed of 780MHz and the memory to 1,000MHz, which is a moderate overclock but one that has a tangible performance difference.

More than the cooler and the slight

overclock, SAPPHIRE has gone with what seems to be a custom PCB that comes in blue, which, while good to look at, makes us wonder why SAPPHIRE didn't add an additional 512MB of GDDR5 on the board to really make it stand out. We have seen that the 1GB cards outperform their 512MB counterparts by a small but noticeable margin. Due to the overclock, however, the TOXIC card outperforms the 1GB variants and is certainly the fastest 4870 we have ever tested.

Instead of bundling a game with the card, SAPPHIRE has included a fully licensed version of Futuremark's latest 3DMark Vantage. In addition to that, you also receive what AMD/ATI dubs the "Ruby ROM", which has game demos and the like that help show off AMD/ATI's HD 4800 series graphics cards.

The SAPPHIRE 4870 TOXIC is great as a standalone card, but if you own a P45, X38 or X48 board, then two of them in CrossFire deliver what could arguably be the best visual experience money can buy for the PC. You can install up to four graphics cards in an AMD platform or two in a traditional Intel LGA775 system. In each case, the performance scaling in CrossFire is nothing short of amazing, with some games gaining almost 100% gains [which the ATI driver team should be commended for].

What is worth keeping in mind, especially for P45 chipset users, is that despite the P45 supporting the PCI-E 2.0 standard, eight lanes are still not enough to allow the 4870 to operate at its peak, so there's going to be a performance knock on that chipset

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when compared to a X38- or X48-based system operating in CrossFire mode. The performance difference, however, is less prominent in synthetic tests than in-game frame rates. Even with the 8x lane issue, the 4870 (in particular the TOXIC card) not only delivers great performance, it looks great as well. The package is nothing to write home about apart from the inclusion of 3DMark Vantage, which costs \$19.99 for the Advanced version. If you want a 4870 that is a cut above the rest, and almost a match for the GTX280 (which costs significantly more), the SAPPHIRE HD 4870 TOXIC is the card for you. There simply isn't a better 4870 available locally. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

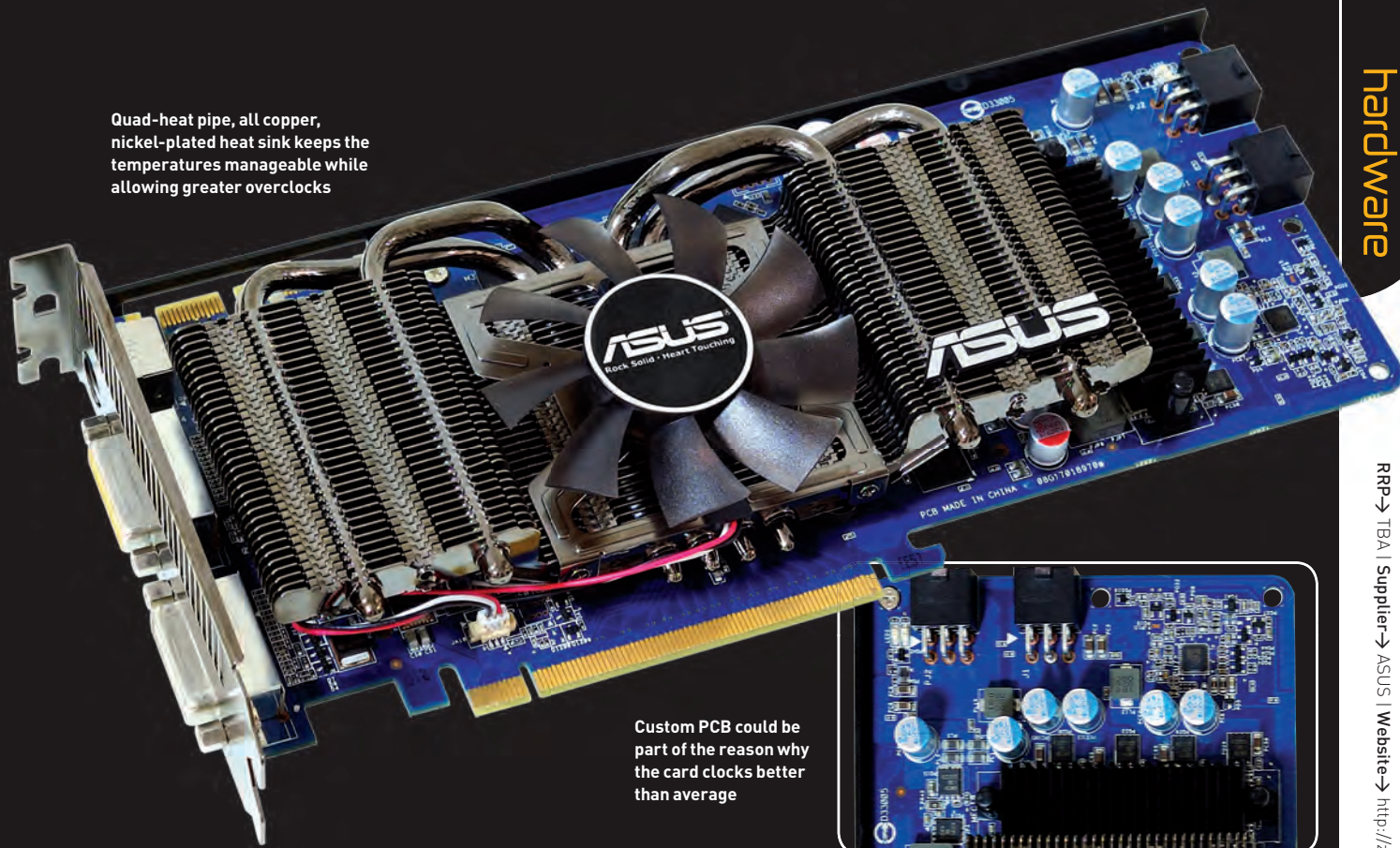
SPECS

CORE	RV770 (780MHz)
PROCESS	956 million gates (55nm low-K TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit GDDR5 (4GHz @ 1ns)
ROPS	16
SHADERS	800
API SUPPORT	OpenGL 2.1/ DirectX 10.1

SCORE



Quad-heat pipe, all copper, nickel-plated heat sink keeps the temperatures manageable while allowing greater overlocks



Custom PCB could be part of the reason why the card clocks better than average

ASUS EN9800GTX+ DK TOP

WHILE IT CAN'T BE said that 2008 was a stellar year for NVIDIA, some key decisions and strong pressure from rival company AMD/ATI has seen NVIDIA release some very impressive cards, especially in the mid- to high-end markets. While the GTX280 remains untouched from its original guise, the GTX260 has since received an upgrade that outfits the GPU with 216 stream processors, up from the original 192. The previous high-end 9800GTX also received an upgrade with a new core dubbed "G92b."

The upgrade came in the form of a die shrink from the larger 65nm TSMC process to a more manageable and obviously better overclocking 55nm process. Not only did the die shrink allow NVIDIA and its various board partners to introduce a new SKU, but it has given some life to the G92 core, which seemingly had run its course, especially when compared against the RV770 (Radeon 4850); which was simply superior in all the popular applications save for a select few, which have always been NVIDIA favourites.

The new G92b GPU - better known as the 9800GTX+ - has a default clock speed of 738MHz - not the largest clock frequency upgrade, but a respectable one nonetheless over the 675MHz of the outgoing 9800GTX. With the slight boost in core clocks (and subsequently stream processor clocks), finally there was a single GPU solution in the NVIDIA 9 series that could match the might of the Radeon 4850.

Not satisfied with the speed bump and with a marketing team clearly impressed

by the recent blockbuster *Dark Knight*, the brains at ASUSTeK spawned the 9800GTX+ Dark Knight TOP edition. What basically separates the DK from the other 9800GTX+ cards are not only the clock speeds, different memory chips and the cooler itself, but the custom blue PCB. The card features Hynix GDDR3 chips operating at an impressive 2.36GHz for a total bandwidth of 75.5GB/sec. It may be unimpressive in the days of memory bandwidth figures over the 110GB/sec mark and memory speeds in excess of 4GHz, but it is worth keeping in mind that the G92 core is very efficient at memory reads and writes. Not only that, but the 9800GTX+ is no longer a high-end card, but one developed to compete with the Radeon 4850 in both performance and price.

The Dark Knight edition features a 775MHz core/front-end clock and a 1,950MHz stream processor clock. These differences allow the Dark Knight to accelerate past any Radeon 4850 we have tested in the past, but because of the custom cooler, the temperatures stay in the safe operating range. The most striking feature about the Dark Knight is indeed the cooler. The nickel plating against the blue PCB makes for a very impressive VGA card; but sadly, in a case where there are no lights, the visuals will be lost (but fortunately the performance will remain).

At this point, it may be particularly difficult to find the right graphics card to purchase, especially if you're upgrading from an 8800GT or Radeon 3870. The high-end parts cost a little too much for

the vast majority of gamers, and what is considered mid-range may not be adequate for recent titles such as *Far Cry 2* and *Crysis Warhead*. As it stands, the 9800GTX+ - and in particular the ASUS Dark Knight TOP model - is probably one of the better buys out there. We were able to run the card quite comfortably at an 800MHz core clock and at an impressive 2.4GHz memory clock. At these speeds, it offers even better performance as expected, and manages to keep up with a Radeon 4870 in some unique cases. Overall, the ASUS EN9800GTX+ DK TOP is a great card and possibly the best 9800GTX+ money can buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CORE	G92b
PROCESS	754 million gates (55nm TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit GDDR3 (2.36GHz)
ROPS	16
STREAM PROCESSORS	128
API SUPPORT	OpenGL 2.1/ DirectX 10

SCORE





MOVIE NEWS

STRONG AS TEN REGULAR MEN

IT'S BEEN SOME TIME in the making, but for some reason it's becoming increasingly difficult to get excited about the upcoming *Prince of Persia* film. Maybe it's Jack "at least 20 kilos too meaty for this" Gyllenhaal in the role of the Prince (or Prince Dastan, as it turns out) after actual Persian David K. Zandi was bumped off the list. Maybe it's the possibility that we're so totally done with the *Sands of Time* series (and will be even more done by time the film hits our screens in mid 2010); or maybe it's just that game-to-movie adaptations almost always disappoint one way or another. Still, it's not all doom and gloom for the film. Director Mike Newell has been doing this long enough to not completely make a mess, and the recently announced inclusion of

ultra creepy-looking Ben Kingsley as bad guy Nizam has us sitting up, especially since the two recently worked together in *The Love Guru*.

Also making an appearance is Alfred Molina (Doctor Octopus in *Spider-Man 2*) as Sheik Amar, and *Quantum of Solace*'s Gemma Arterton as Tamina (we're going to go out on a limb here and name her as the love interest). The story will be one of betrayal: the evil Nizam murders his brother, King Shahrman, and blames the heir (Prince Dastan). When Nizam is crowned king, Dastan is forced to seek out the truth to set him free (it tends to do that), and stop Nizam from getting his nasty clutches on the ever-useful *Sands of Time*, which would allow him to enslave the world with its power.



WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN?

IF YOU'RE NOT CLAWING your way through the weeks in anticipation of the perpetually delayed *Watchmen* film, there's possibly something wrong with you. Sure, it could be "Just another movie adaptation of a comic book," but it's the book on which it's based that has us so excited. Alan Moore's oozing-with-class 1980s graphic novel took the concept of superheroes and ran wild through the streets of creativity, but the film has been start-stop since its inception thanks to some nasty rights ownership battles between Fox and Warner Bros. While the case hasn't yet been finalised, the Website (<http://watchmenmovie.warnerbros.com>) has updated its character profiles with the addition of The Comedian - perhaps the book's most twisted and bad-ass character - leading us to believe things are moving along nicely in time for a release next year.



ONE FOR THE FANS...

IF THERE'S ONE FORM of fanboy that outnumbers every other type in the world, it's the dreaded *Star Wars* fanboy. These lightsaber-obsessed, light-speeding, Darth Maul-loving moviegoers have now reached critical mass in their worldwide growth, apparently warranting them (and by "them," I secretly mean "us") their very own film. Following the guidelines of films like *American Pie* and *Road Trip*, *Fanboys* takes us on an adventure of stupidly epic proportions

with Sam Huntington, Chris Marquette and Dan Fogler - a group of *Star Wars* junkies with the bright idea of breaking into George Lucas's famous Skywalker Ranch. The film, which has been in development for a number of years already, will likely make it to cinemas early next year. There's a trailer available on the Net for anyone not quite sure if they give a damn. It looks deserving enough, and the content is right up our alley.





TINTIN MOVIE GETS THE GREEN LIGHT

GEORGES "HERGÉ" REMI'S BELOVED Belgian adventurer Tintin will finally be making his way onto the big screen. After months of struggle and debate with Dreamworks Pictures, who eventually pulled out of the deal completely, Sony and Paramount Pictures have picked up the lost project and put the bearded duo of Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson at the helm. Set to be a trilogy, with the third film still very much up in the air, the *Tintin* movies will follow the stories of *The Secret of the Unicorn* and *Red Rackham's Treasure*. While filming was supposed to begin months ago, and will only likely begin early next year, the producers are confident that the film will be ready for release in 2010. The cast is yet to be finalised, but speculation and rumours are pinning 17-year-old Thomas Sangster as Tintin, and Andy Serkis (who you may remember as the voice and motion behind Golem) as the blisteringly, barnacled Captain Haddock.



ATTACK OF THE SIXTY-FOOT BLOB

IT'S GOT MONSTERS! IT'S got aliens! It's next in the line of cutesy 3D animated films from DreamWorks Animation and you know you want to watch it. Playing on classic monster (and alien) films from the golden era of filmmaking, *Monsters vs. Aliens* lets us in on the secret scientific plot the US government has been working on for some time: creating a collection of super-monsters, of course. Handy thing, really, when the Earth is invaded by a race of hostile aliens hell-bent on destroying the planet. Running the show are directors Rob Letterman (*Shrek Tale*) and Conrad Vernon (the *Shrek* series, *Madagascar*, *Bee Movie*), and it'll be showing in 3D at cinemas Q1/Q2 next year.



SUPER TRILOGY

THE CREATIVE MIND BEHIND *Ultimates*, *Wanted* and the alternative-world *Superman: Red Son*, comic book writer Mark Millar, has some big plans for revitalising the Superman brand on the big screen. It's something he's been thinking about for the last ten years and now it looks like it might finally become a reality – a new seven-hour epic spread across three films. Currently in discussion with Warner, and having already nabbed a director and producer, Millar is looking at drawing tears from fans across the globe with this *Godfather*-inspired saga of the life and times of Superman.

"I want to start on Krypton, a thousand years ago, and end with Superman alone on planet Earth, the last being left on the planet, as the yellow Sun turns red and starts to supernova, and he loses his powers."



DVDs for the fans...



The Dark Knight
(2 DVD)
Available From 8 Dec

R159⁹⁹

The follow-up to *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight* reunites director Christopher Nolan and star Christian Bale, who reprises the role of Batman/Bruce Wayne in his continuing war on crime. With the help of Lt. Jim Gordon and District Attorney Harvey Dent, Batman sets out to destroy organized crime in Gotham for good. The triumvirate proves effective, but soon find themselves prey to a rising criminal mastermind known as The Joker, who thrusts Gotham into anarchy and forces Batman closer to crossing the fine line between hero and vigilante.

Over 3 hours of bonus material including:

- An inside look at the creation of the movie with director Christopher Nolan.
- 2 separate documentaries exploring the psyche of Batman and his arsenal of weapons.
- Includes action packed IMAX® framed sequences
- BD-Live



The Dark Knight
(2 Disc)
Available From 8 Dec

R299⁹⁹



The Dark Knight
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(2 DVD)
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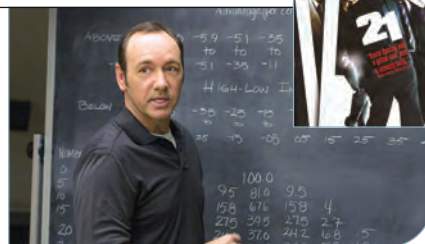
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Look@Listen
For the Fans

Director: Robert Luketic
Cast: Jim Sturgess | Kevin Spacey | Kate Bosworth | Laurence Fishburne
Genre: Thriller
Age Restriction: 13 (V)
Run Time: 123 minutes
Score: ★★★

BASED ON THE BESTSELLING book by Ben Mezrich, *21* tells the true-life story of six M.I.T. students who cleverly 'took' millions of dollars from Las Vegas casinos by counting cards in Blackjack. Ben Campbell (Jim Sturgess) is a student who struggles to afford his tuition. He is approached by his maths Professor, Micky Rosa (Kevin Spacey), to join a secret group of students who play Blackjack by counting cards. Campbell hesitantly joins the group and soon



becomes a key member of the team. As the team is introduced, it's rather obvious to spot that the team dynamic will cause some friction between the players, and as a result sees the movie focusing on some of the players' relationships. One weekend, the group travels to Las Vegas, but they are soon discovered by the casino security chief, Cole Williams (Laurence Fishburne), and a kind of cat-and-mouse game

ensues. While *21* is entertaining, there is so much more that the director could have done to make this a great movie. The script is a little clumsy, and the story's a bit 'loose'. Spacey and Fishburne's presence saves this movie from a potential B-grade rating. *21* is fun, nonetheless, and is enjoyable for a midweek movie night – more so if you are a card player.

Regardt van der Berg

THE SCORPION KING 2: RISE OF A WARRIOR

Director: Russell Mulcahy
Cast: Michael Copon | Karen David | Simon Quarterman | Tom Wu | Andreas Wisniewski
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: 13 (V)
Run Time: 104 minutes
Score: ★★

THIS MOVIE IS GREAT if you enjoy sitting down on a Friday night with a few friends, watching a decidedly average film and pointing out (while quietly giggling) all the cheesy bits that occur once every two minutes. If you're not that type of person, this is probably one of those flicks that you're going to want to stay far away from. The plot is passable at best and follows an arrogant kid on his quest to fill the movie with as many action sequences as possible. Serving as a prequel to the original *Scorpion King*, *The Scorpion King 2* features acting that ranges from 'okay' to 'just plain silly', special effects that could have been done by



an eight-year old sporting a roll of cello tape and some paperclips, and dialogue that is at times as corny as the day is long. Despite all this, the movie still somehow manages to make for some mildly entertaining viewing, and some of the combat sequences are actually quite enjoyable to watch.

Special features include a few deleted scenes, a gag reel, the mandatory 'Making of' featurette, a special on those dodgy visual effects mentioned earlier, and a feature called "Fight like an Akkadian: Black Scorpion Training Cam.". Riveting stuff.

Dane Remendes

THE FORBIDDEN KINGDOM

Director: Rob Minkoff
Cast: Jackie Chan | Jet Li | Collin Chou | Liu Yifei | Li Bing | Michael Angarano
Genre: Action Adventure
Age Restriction: PG (13)
Run Time: 99 minutes
Score: ★★★

WHEN I FIRST HEARD about this movie, I got overly excited. Jackie Chan and Jet Li together in the same film? How could that possibly go wrong! Well, now that I've watched it, I can honestly say that this movie is not as good as it could have been. It's not terrible; it just feels like they could have taken it much further. At its heart, *The Forbidden Kingdom* is a coming-of-age story about a nerdy guy (who, as is the case with most nerdy guys in movies, gets his ass kicked an awful lot) who loves kung-fu flicks and eventually manages to learn kung-fu himself, thereby instantly transforming him into a non-victim of nerd ass kicking. I expected to see plenty of epic martial arts scenes in which Li and Chan pull out



all the stops and kick, punch and generally inflict grievous bodily harm on one another. While they do have one fight scene that plays out as such (and it is quite entertaining), it's not enough to save this movie from its average status. On the plus side, this movie has very high production values and the fight

scenes (those that don't meet the aforementioned Li vs. Chan standard) are actually very impressive. Definitely not the worst movie you'll ever watch, but certainly not the best either. Special features are largely non-existent, aside from a few trailers.

Dane Remendes

SPEED RACER

Director(s): Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski
Cast: Emile Hirsch | Christina Ricci | John Goodman | Susan Sarandon | Matthew Fox
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: 13 (PG)
Run Time: 135 minutes
Score: ★★



WITH THE MATRIX, JOEL Silver, Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski pulled off a minor miracle and put together what many consider one of the best science fiction, action extravaganzas ever made. Dude! The sequels weren't too bad either. Five years after the third *Matrix* sequel, out pops *Speed Racer*, their latest wiz-bang, über-technical and understandably highly anticipated next big thing... hmm, not so much. Once you get past the crazy visuals, the improbable physics, the initially hard to follow plot, the guy from *Lost*, and the monkey, it's not a completely terrible movie for kids. The acting is also a little goofy, but suits the style of the movie rather well, with a particularly good performance by Roger Allam who plays E. P. Arnold Royalton (the big-boss bad guy). If you're progressive and view the whole experience as an experimental real-life cartoon, you might enjoy it, because the movie has flair, style and innovation. For everyone else, stay away: you're not going to get it or enjoy it, and if you don't have kids,

you'll probably turn it off after the first half hour. There are two special features on the DVD: a comedic 'how-we-made-the-movie' with Spritle Racer, played by Paulie Litt; and a mock documentary about the teams, tracks and cars. The behind-the-scenes feature is disappointingly short (about 15 minutes), and covers a lot of the technical movie making, but obviously does little more than scratch the surface. Finally, to add shame to an already embarrassing effort, at some retail outlets you get a free Frisbee if you buy the movie.

Michael James

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Director: Louis Leterrier
Cast: Edward Norton | Liv Tyler | Tim Roth | Tim Blake Nelson | Ty Burrell | William Hurt
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: PG 13 (V)
Run Time: 108 minutes
Score: ★★★★★



ANG LEE'S TAKE ON the green behemoth in *Hulk* back in 2003 was met with mixed feelings, to say the least. It's safe to say that this new film is definitely far better than the previous *Hulk* film, but it's not perfect. Unlike other movies based on comic books, *The Incredible Hulk* doesn't waste time dealing with a lengthy story of the character's origin. The story behind the transformation of Bruce Banner into the Hulk is handled in the opening credits, briefly giving viewers who are still unsure as to how the tale of the monster/hero began some insight as to the nature of the character. This allows the rest of the movie to spend time showing us how Banner deals with his alienation from the rest of the world, thanks to the monster within him. There's a fair amount of action in the movie and we get to see the Hulk smashing things reasonably often. It's a fun movie to watch, especially the sequences during which everybody's favourite green meanie goes up against the Abomination and the two of

them lay waste to entire city blocks as they attempt to gain the upper hand. One thing that ought to get comic book buffs all excited is the scene with Tony Stark (*Iron Man*) at the end of the movie: it's sure to create plenty of buzz about the upcoming *Avengers* movie. Not much in terms of special features, aside from commentary by the director of the film and Tim Roth, along with a few trailers that wormed their way onto the disc.

Dane Remendes

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- Enhanced hot keys, speed up intelligent game
- Comfortable non-slip grip suitable for either hands to handheld

"Available Country Wide"



BE KIND REWIND

Director: Michael Gondry
Cast: Jack Black | Mos Def | Danny Glover
Genre: Comedy
Age Restriction: PG (L)
Run Time: 98 minutes
Score: ★★★

JACK BLACK IS ONCE again reaching outside of his slapstick comfort zone, alongside Hip-Hop artist Mos Def and veteran actor Danny Glover in *Be Kind Rewind*. Written and directed by little-known Frenchman, Michael Gondry, the film takes place in the pokey town of Passaic, New Jersey – supposedly the only place to find ‘real’ jazz during the genre’s birth in the early 1900s. When a young video rental store clerk, Mike (Mos Def), and his mechanic friend, Jerry (Jack

Black), accidentally erase the contents of all the video tapes in the store, they’re faced with the challenge of not just staying on the store owner’s good side, but figuring out a way to keep the last few remaining customers happy. So, they do what any other normal person would do: film over the blank movies with their own renditions. What ensues is a quirky series of remakes starring Mike and Jerry, as well as anyone else crazy and available enough to get involved.

It’s difficult to describe the movie without using the word “charming” – it really is. It tells a story about trust, family, looking out for what you care for, and keeping a sense of humour while you do it; all with well-written dialogue, excellent acting and a few really classy touches by its French creator.

The DVD’s special features are the usual fare,



including a ‘Making of’ and interviews, as well as the main homemade film around which the story is focused and a few other treats.

Geoff Burrows

RUN, FATBOY, RUN

Director: David Schwimmer
Cast: Simon Pegg | Thandie Newton | Hank Azaria | Dylan Moran | Harish Patel
Genre: Romantic Comedy
Age Restriction: 10 (LV)
Run Time: 96 minutes
Score: ★★★★★

I DON’T USUALLY LIKE ROMANTIC comedies, but I do enjoy Simon Pegg’s brand of comedy. He’s his usual self in this flick, but that’s never a bad thing. The film shows that in order to get the woman you love, you don’t need to be a good-looking, rich and powerful dude – all you have to do is run a 26-mile marathon. It’s usually a 10-mile marathon, but they add on the extra distance when the woman you love happens to be your ex-fiancée, whom you left at the altar on your wedding day while she was pregnant with your child. Unfortunately, running a marathon is easier said than done, especially when you’re an unfit, overweight smoker in the



same vein as Pegg’s character. The film has plenty of comedic situations and I constantly had a smile on my face while watching it. Considering that forcing a perpetual smile from its viewers is what most comedies always set out to do in the first place, *Run, Fatboy, Run* is a winner in my



opinion. If you’re a fan of comedies, then watching this movie is a great way to spend an hour and a half. Special features include commentary by the people behind the film, a few deleted scenes, outtakes, a gag reel and trailers.

Dane Remendes

NEVER BACK DOWN

Director: Jeff Wadlow
Cast: Sean Faris | Amber Heard | Cam Gigandet | Evan Peters | Leslie Hope | Djimon Hounsou
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: 16 (V)
Run Time: 113 minutes
Score: ★★

THIS MOVIE IS THE teen-drama version of *Fight Club*: there aren’t any gritty, makeshift underground arenas, there’s no fighting in the muck, and nobody makes soap. That’s all been replaced by a bunch of pretty boys and girls who fight in nightclubs, gigantic upmarket homes and surprisingly clean parking lots. That’s what this movie is about: school kids (whose parents have far too much money) with a desire to gain personal fame and the adoration of the opposite sex by smacking the crap out of each other. The film has high production values, but it’s not a whole lot of fun to watch. There is a story behind it all, but it’s really just an excuse



to constantly keep the fight scenes coming. The film is watchable, but when watching it, you’ll get that it’s-been-done-before feeling. If you feel the need to watch guys smack the snot out of each other, and you’ve never seen *Fight Club*, watch that instead. Hell, even if you’ve seen it before, rather



watch that again before wasting cash on this one. Special features include a commentary with the filmmakers, some deleted scenes, a feature on the martial arts seen in the movie and a feature called, “How to fight like a champ with Bas Rutten.”

Dane Remendes

CLOVERFIELD

Director: Matt Reeves

Cast: Lizzy Caplan | Jessica Lucas | T.J. Miller | Michael Stahl-David | Mike Vogel | Odette Yustman

Genre: Reality Horror

Age Restriction: 13 (V)

Run Time: 85 minutes

Score: ★★★★★

CLOVERFIELD IS AN EXAMPLE of 'genre inbreeding': think *The Blair Witch Project* (minus the marketing rubbish) meets *Godzilla* (minus Tokyo). Set in New York, *Cloverfield* is about one night gone horribly wrong, captured on a video camera carried by one of the characters in the movie. The genius behind the movie (and opinions will vary) is that you have amateur camera footage (shaking, pointing at the ground and generally being knocked around) mixed with some leading-edge special effects. There's a special kind of humour in that the creators of the movie worked so hard and long to make it look as natural and unprofessional as possible. The director, special effects team and actors have put together a very believable-looking movie that'll be hard to follow with anything similar. The special edition version (in a natty green tin box) has an entire second DVD packed with special features such as outtakes, alternate endings and deleted scenes, mostly all commented on by the director. There are also a fascinating 'Making of', video diary and enough additional content to make the purchase worthwhile



for any fan. If you'd like a different kind of movie experience, then *Cloverfield* is going to amaze you and leave you wondering how they managed to make it all look so authentic and terrifying. In fact, it's better if you don't watch the 'Making of' featurette.

Michael James

CITY OF MEN

Director: Paulo Morelli

Cast: Douglas Silva | Darlan Cunha | Jonathan Haagensen

Genre: Action Drama

Age Restriction: 16 (LV)

Run Time: 102 minutes

Score: ★★★

FERNANDO MEIRELLES IS BACK with the follow-up to his hard-hitting 2002 film, *City of God*. Both films, as well as the mini-series also entitled *City of Men*, focuses on the trials and perils of gang life in Rio de Janeiro. When tempers flare and rival gangs start breaking out the guns in Dead End Hill (which you may remember seeing in the recent *Hulk* film), best friends Acerola and Laranjinha are forced to put their loyalty and trust to the test. While I haven't seen the mini-series on which the film is based, it features many of the same actors and makes numerous references to their past. Thankfully, though, it's not required to have seen the mini-series to understand the story.

It's a gripping tale that encompasses a lot of human interactions, from betrayal to love. Be sure to give the film a bit of patience, though, as the dialogue and script are a little too simple and functional for the kind of setting the film takes place in, but it does pick up pace further in. The cinematography



is dynamic and does all the right things at the right time, and there are truly excellent uses of light and colour that bring some potentially bland scenes to life.

The DVD comes only with Portuguese audio, but has English subtitles. It also features *Building a City of Men*, a 'Making of' with a few interesting interviews for those looking to soak up a bit more culture.

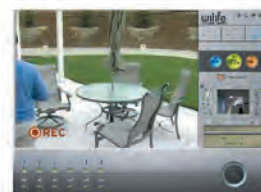
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CITY OF DUST #1 (OF 5)

Format: Comic Mini-Series
Publisher: Radical Comics
Writer: Steve Niles
Artist: Zid
Price: R34.95



IF YOU HAVE NEVER heard of Steve Niles before, then it's time to crawl out of that hole you've been living in. One of the best comic book writers out there, responsible for such titles as *30 Days of Night* and *Criminal Macabre*, having been involved with issues of *Spawn* and various horror story adaptations, and even being involved with a few movies, it isn't really too surprising that Niles' latest comic, *City of Dust*, looks to be a masterpiece. The story is set in a gloomy future, where having an imagination, religious beliefs, or even telling your kids a fairy tale before bed, is strictly outlawed. But when strange creatures start turning nightmare into reality, doubting cop Philip Khrome finds himself in the middle of a mysterious murder spree, while his beliefs in the law are shaken. Wonderfully written, and with stunning artwork which merely serves to flatter the book, *City of Dust* has got to be one of the best first issues which I've seen from a new comic series for a long time.

Clive Burmeister



GEARS OF WAR #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Wildstorm
Writer: Joshua Ortega
Artist: Liam Sharp
Price: R39.95



THE GEARS OF WAR comic, based on the best selling video game franchise, tells the story of a squad of gears who are stuck in the badlands battling fiendish creatures while they search for some soldiers who are missing in action. It captures the action, horror, and grim surroundings of the game expertly with its exciting story and grisly artwork. Having seen many comics and books trying to take on the story and feel of a franchise, and disappointing their fans in the process, I think this comic is not one of those cases. Ortega attains the feel of the game through its quick paced story-telling and immersive script, while artist Liam Sharp compliments the book with his detailed drawings of characters, and the sense of motion which he conjures in his battles scenes. *Gears of War* is simply an enjoyable read, for fans of the game, fans of war sci-fi, or just fans of enjoyable comics.

Clive Burmeister



BATMAN THE BLACK GLOVE

Format: Hard-cover graphic novel
Publisher: DC
Writers: Grant Morrison
Artists: J.H. Williams III, Tony S. Daniel
Price: R255



WHEN GRANT MORRISON TOOK over the *Batman* series in 2006, he did so with the goal of rebuilding Bruce Wayne and his baty alter ego from the ground up. *The Black Glove* is book two of Morrison's new take on *Batman*, beginning at issue #667. While it's helpful to have read the previous book, the two major plot arcs in *The Black Glove* stand sufficiently on their own to make enough sense to anyone who at least knows a bit about *Batman*. The first story, *The Club of Heroes*, sees *Batman* and a number of global wannabes trapped in a house by a mysterious killer. It's eerie and well-paced, with a 'whodunnit' flavour that really enhances the *Batman* lore. The second story continues from issue #672 and deals with the creation, escape and violent return of three *Batman* clones (of sorts), now hell-bent on hunting down their source.

Both mini-series in the book are excellently written by Morrison (as one would expect) and beautifully pencilled by J.H. Williams III. The script tends to get a little crazy at times, but is expertly-balanced by Williams' gritty yet brilliantly-flowing panels.

Geoff Burrows

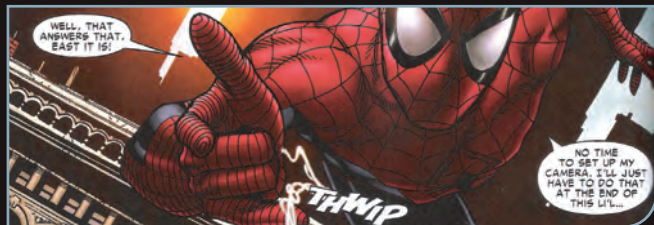


THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN - BRAND NEW DAY VOL. 1

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Dan Slott
Artists: Phil Jimenez
Price: R219.95

SPIDER-MAN'S BRAND NEW DAY story arc begins a whole new take on the ongoing *Spider-man* series, making it the perfect starting point for anyone wanting to get into the comic now, and also freshening up the whole plot and direction of the comic book. In this book, Peter Parker is still facing all the problems in his life which so define him as one of the most popular and easy to associate with characters in comics; problems like finding a new job, a place of his own which he can afford, the moral dilemmas of whether he's actually doing any good as a super hero, and the generally tough time he always has in juggling his ordinary life and secret identity around just trying to cope with his day to day living. Added to that, he is also operating as an unregistered super hero, so S.H.I.E.L.D. also have operatives out looking for him in order to arrest him and make his identity known. All in all, it may be a brand new day for the *Amazing Spider-man* comic series, but it's the same old business as usual for the Spider-man we've come to know and love. So if you've been feeling like you have missed out on your Spidey comics, the boys at Marvel made this joining point just for you.

Clive Burmeister



THOR - THE TRUTH OF HISTORY

Format: Comic One-Shot
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Alan Davis
Artist: Mark Farmer
Price: R47.50

FOUR THOUSAND YEARS AGO in a battle against Queen Nedra's minions, Thor uncovered a mystic portal to Midgard. Following one of his lost companions through the portal, Thor finds himself in Egypt, and sets about tracking down his friend Volstagg. But things are never easy as Thor discovers, and what he intended to be a quick rescue mission eluding the notice of the pantheons who made a pact not to interfere with the affairs of humans, becomes a huge incident which changes the land of the pharaohs' forever, even if the scholars of today cannot recognize the truth. *Thor - The Truth of History* is an enjoyable single issue comic, and although the artwork and writing are not astounding, they serve for the light reading story this is. With a lot of comics from Marvel playing on the origins of the popular Thor character, it is also a refreshing look and subtle reminder of why Thor is known amongst the greatest of Marvel's heroes.

Clive Burmeister

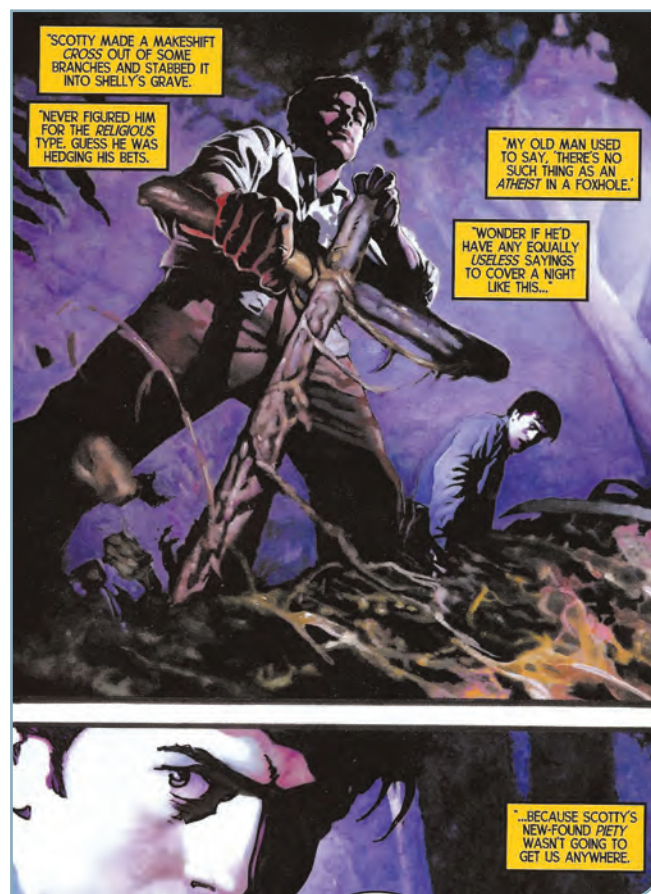
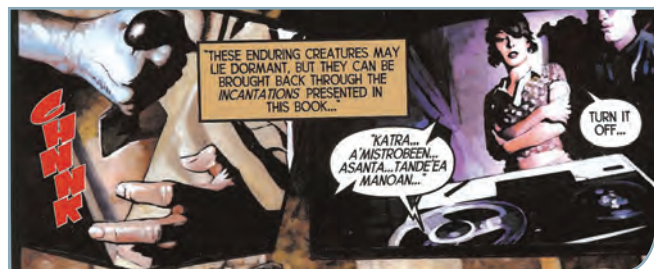


THE EVIL DEAD BOOK 1

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse Books
Writer: Mark Verheiden
Artist: John Bolton
Price: R155

MARK VERHEIDEN'S ADAPTION/EXPANSION of the 1981 horror classic, brought to us by the free-spirited Dark Horse Books, is a grimy and gory take on what some have called the greatest horror series of its time. Book 1 takes place in the grotty, shabby woodland cabin seen in the film, where a group of would-be weekend romancers find a little less lovin' and a little more undead flesh-eating zombies than they were banking on. When the group accidentally discovers the legendary *Book of the Dead*, things start going from bad to worse as the dead rise from their shallow graves and the trees themselves join the battle against the living. Experienced artist and painter John Bolton finely recreates the visuals from the film in his distinctive style, while Verheiden's further exploration of the characters and script is perfect for anyone looking to dig a little deeper into the series.

Geoff Burrows



BATMAN: BLACK AND WHITE GOTHAM KNIGHT STATUE

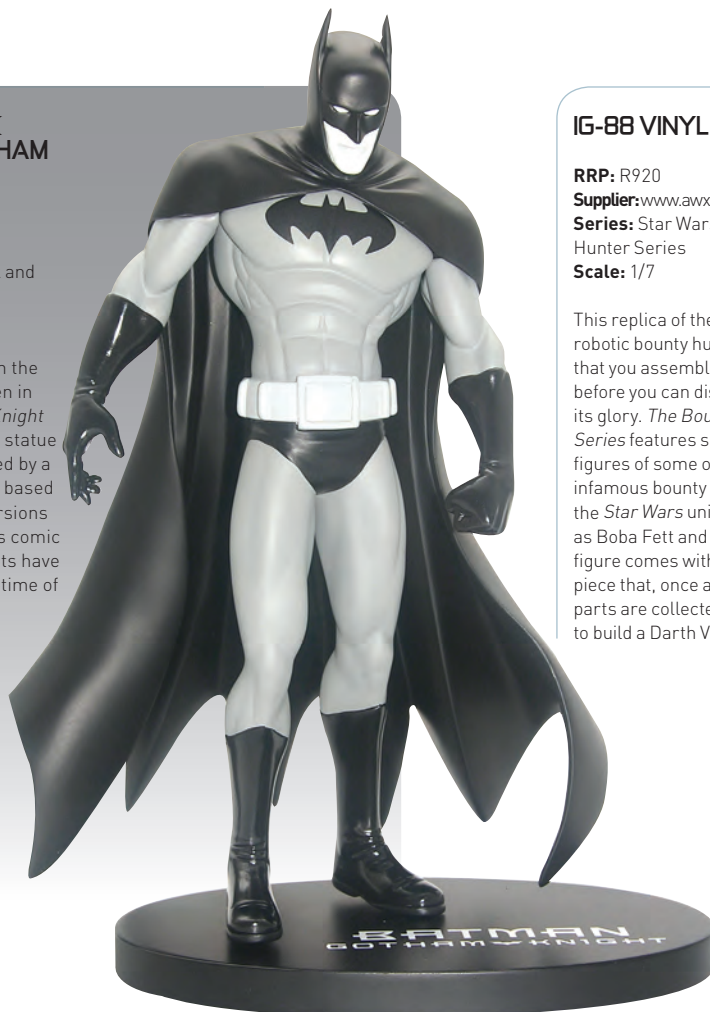
RRP: R920

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Batman: Black and White Statues

Scale: 1/7

This statue is based on the version of Batman seen in the *Batman Gotham Knight* animated movie. Each statue in the series is sculpted by a separate artist, and is based on one of the many versions of Batman that various comic book writers and artists have created during the lifetime of the character.



IG-88 VINYL KIT

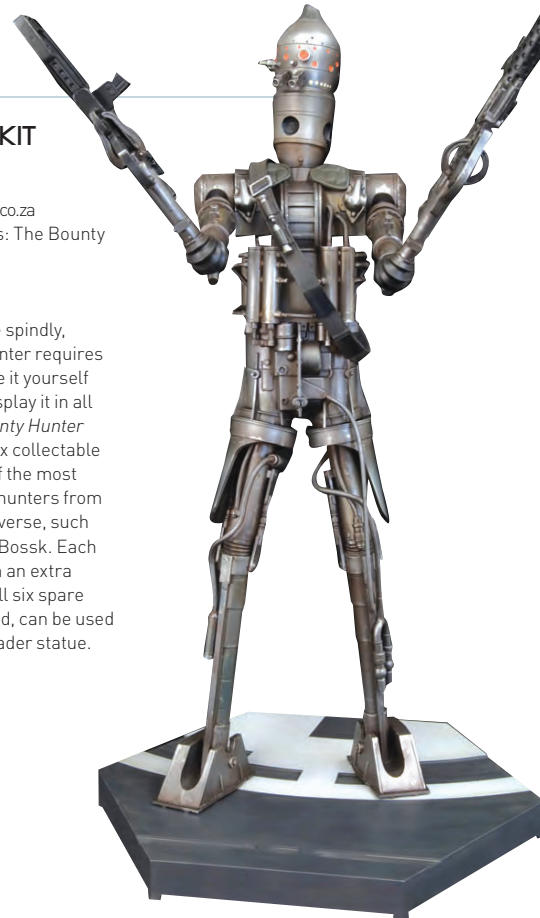
RRP: R920

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Star Wars: The Bounty Hunter Series

Scale: 1/7

This replica of the spindly, robotic bounty hunter requires that you assemble it yourself before you can display it in all its glory. *The Bounty Hunter Series* features six collectable figures of some of the most infamous bounty hunters from the *Star Wars* universe, such as Boba Fett and Bossk. Each figure comes with an extra piece that, once all six spare parts are collected, can be used to build a Darth Vader statue.



RESIDENT EVIL: T-VIRUS ANTIDOTE

RRP: R40 each

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Star Wars: The Bounty Hunter Series

This energy drink may not protect you from a zombie outbreak, but the can looks good and it should stop you from losing consciousness while a bunch of zombies eat you alive.



LUKE SKYWALKER BOBBLE HEAD

RRP: R125

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Star Wars Bobble Heads

Watch Luke Skywalker's head bobble on this 7-inch tall replica. It's that simple.



DARTH MAUL BOBBLE HEAD

RRP: R150

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Star Wars Bobble Heads

It's a 7-inch tall replica of Darth Maul that's also a bobble head. Seriously, it's not exactly rocket science. You must buy them both - there has to be balance in the Force.



NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. MUSHROOM SOUR CANDY

RRP: R60 each

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Star Wars: The Bounty Hunter Series

"Thank you Mario! But our Princess is in another castle." Repeat those words over and over in your head, and then have some sour candy.



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1000

Model no.	GZ-AX1CBS-SNS / SNG / SNB
Dimensions	185 x 410 x 480 mm (W x H x D)
Colors	Silver / Metallic gray / Black
Side panel	Intel CAG 1.1 fan duct
Material	Aluminum + Steel mesh + SECC
Drive bays	5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 1 (External) 3.5" x 6 (Internal)
Form factor	ATX / Micro ATX
I/O ports	USB x 2, 1394 x 1, HD+AC'97 x 1
Fans	12cm silent x 2

1020

Model no.	GZ-AX2CBS-SNS / SNG / SNB
Dimensions	185 x 410 x 480 mm (W x H x D)
Colors	Silver / Metallic gray / Black
Side panel	Intel CAG 1.1 fan duct
Material	Aluminum + SECC
Drive bays	5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 1 (External) 3.5" x 5 (Internal)
Form factor	ATX / Micro ATX
I/O ports	USB x 2, 1394 x 1, HD+AC'97 x 1
Fans	12cm silent x 2



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